



Time/Space



**In Amerika They Call Us Dykes:  
Lesbian Lives in the 70s**

*Sinister Wisdom*  
A Multicultural Lesbian  
Literary & Art Journal  
The oldest surviving lesbian  
literary journal  
publishing since 1976

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## Notes for a Magazine

This year, 2011, marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of *Sinister Wisdom*. Since Merry and I became co-editors of *Sinister Wisdom*, we have been thinking a lot about the legacy of the journal and about what it means to be publishing a journal of lesbian art and culture today today. In the first “Notes for a Magazine” in 1976, Catherine Nicholson and Harriet Desmoines, the founders of *Sinister Wisdom* and the first co-editors, declared themselves “lesbian separatists because no other political position satisfied.” Desmoines wrote on behalf of herself and Catherine Nicholson,

*Sinister Wisdom* is our political action. We believe that writing of a certain consciousness has greater impact when it's collected, when several voices give weight, harmony, and countermelody to the individual message. The consciousness we want *Sinister Wisdom* to express is briefly that of the lesbian or lunatic who embraces her boundary/criminal status, with the aim of creating a new species in a new time/space.

For thirty-five years, *Sinister Wisdom* has been exploring the consciousness of lesbian and the boundary/criminal status. In this issue, with the theme of Time/Space, we revisit Desmoines's desire to create a new species. A variety of lesbian poets and writers explore different moments in space and time all reaching to articulate: what does it mean to be lesbian today? You will find a variety of answers that we hope will delight and inspire in the work gathered in this issue.

In addition to poetry and fiction, we include two historical accounts about lesbianism from our comrade, Jean Taylor, in Australia and two reports from recent conferences. The recent end of *off our backs*, the feminist news journal, which published for nearly forty years, leaves a vacuum with few sources for quality news and information about what is happening in lesbian and feminist worlds. This need for vibrant and exciting journals by, for, and about lesbians isn't new; in 1987, Barbara Grier noted in the *Feminist Bookstore News* that “we are becoming a community with no topical voice.” She continued, “We have no *Lesbian Advocate*, no *Lesbian Ms.*, no *Lesbian Christopher Street*. . . .and saddest of all, no punch literate

information-filled combination of all three.” Sadly, nearly twenty-five years later the same is true. Although we treasure magazines like *Curve* in the United States, the LGBT journal *Chroma* from the United Kingdom, and the venerable *Lesbian Connection*, we still don’t have the magazine Grier envisioned with “good fiction, good and very letter poetry, hard hitting and topical non-fiction ranging from child care for Lesbians through handling political differences in a community plus the endless stream of topics dealing with relationships. . . .some humor, some reportage on our ‘culture’, some reviewing of music, books, events, some drama you name it. . . .even some high-faluting crap and a dollop of ‘theory.’” While we don’t think *Sinister Wisdom* can fulfill Grier’s vision, we do want it to be a vibrant and vital source for lesbian art and culture.

Merry and I are conscious of the ever changing meaning of lesbian in the twenty-first century and of how important it is that we have a place to explore those meanings. We want to edit and curate *Sinister Wisdom* as a literary and arts magazine of the highest quality for lesbian artists, writers, and activists. We hope over the next years to meet these twin goals.

Thank you for reading and supporting *Sinister Wisdom*. Together, we are expressing, celebrating, and embracing lesbian consciousness in time/space.  
In sisterhood,

Julie R. Enszer  
October 2011

## Where To Find Sinister Wisdom

Antigone Books (Tucson, AZ)  
Bear Pond Books (Montpelier, VT)  
Bloodroot (Bridgeport, CT)  
Bluestockings Bookstore (New York, NY)\*  
Giovanni's Room (Philadelphia, PA)  
Galaxy Books (Hardwick, VT)  
In Other Words (Portland, OR)  
Bear Pond Books (Montpelier, VT)  
Goddard College Library (Plainfield, VT)  
Left Bank Books (Hanover, NH)  
Dartmouth Barnes and Noble (Hanover, NH)  
True Colors Bookstore (Minneapolis, MN)  
Wild Iris Books (Gainesville, FL)\*

\*New bookstore since our last issue.

Our list of places to find *Sinister Wisdom* is growing! Join the *Sinister Wisdom* Community Distribution Network and help spread the work of Sinister Wisdom. More information is available at [www.SinisterWisdom.org](http://www.SinisterWisdom.org) and on our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/SinisterWisdom>.

**Epis**

**Melissa Buckheit**

*for Rebecca*

the first moment I slipped inside  
we were born

hand who shines and shines  
reflecting

your soul a vine  
herding  
cosmic string

shyest delight  
shyest fire  
obliterates

always sleep  
in the sleeve of my collarbone

when you speak  
you speak  
poetry's rise

Sappho knew your name

two hundred stars  
all nameless  
evening's



call me with the knife  
of your tongue  
flower

no snake  
but one tended in the temple

baby again named

in the forest the fruit of your nipples

Eve remembers

## **Fourth Wall as Spatial Design for Lovers**

**Melissa Buckheit**

Outside the yard

you're mixing paints for the new  
voltage of the body

How much can you charge her before she  
rips off into the night  
green on blue      red on orange      the difference

pigment, one teaspoon of sun

jammed down the throat of a passer-by  
will not save us.

The plexiglas is a shield between you & the nude

her breasts pucker as she falls asleep  
in the declining day  
sprawled on the carpet, her  
most intimate sleep in your gaze.

You have to wake her

to arrange the limbs again, frozen  
and drowsy      slightly overweight

she is as your mother would have been  
if she had been someone else

a model    a woman      not a wife.

You circle the house  
on a wish      from how many directions

can you invent her, firestorm in the distance

nuggets of rock break the sky  
into its elements

blue from yellow          our bodies from  
what it takes us to get there.

The paint feels wet through the glass  
its you alone in a room

in the lessening light

suspended in her heat,

a double image no face but hair

like a talisman for the wrong gender.

I was sunbathing on the rockface

when I said I liked you

it's easier to cross,  
with our other bodies, here,

performing the functional tasks, eating  
sleeping, speaking in each other's ears,  
ambulation.

A nice walk is profoundly calming

6 a.m., the sun charges you  
a chemical bath

2 parts your palette hums  
in its beauty.

Otherwise we are caustic  
we are planning ourselves

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in shy light

the paint covers your body  
charcoal on your forearms

as you throw yourself against the paper

wouldn't it be funny  
to mark yourself

to a plane where a woman

owns her sexual organs?

Where you fly your own body out  
as the nude

blissed and in terror

I watch my breath regulating

the air traveling in even waves

a daily swap with yoga  
in a chair in the yard

who can say

in which direction we will turn.

## **Ariadne and Harriet at Sea**

### **Chrystal Wing**

Ariadne used a furred orange umbrella to paddle her nest toward Harriet, but it was difficult to keep herself going in a straight line. In the distance, Harriet's nest also rode the swells of the open sea. She was paddling with her hands, a modified breast stroke, her body sprawled forward over the rim of rough branches. They both looked up at the same time, their eyes meeting. Quickly they averted their gaze.

The sun was too loud. Even the cat looked hot. She crouched on the nest's edge, one paw dabbing at the silvery-green waves. Ariadne pulled aside the collar of her pajama top and peered down; a triangle of sunburn marked her chest. "Damn!" she said. She yanked her rucked up pajama legs down over her exposed shins and continued paddling, her nest swiveling from side to side. As she came closer, she stared at Harriet. She wore a tank top with her pajama bottoms; her shoulders had the same vivid hue as Ariadne's chest.

"What?" said Harriet, pushing herself away from the nest's edge and sitting up.

"Nothing."

"What is it? You were looking at me."

"I was wondering if you'd like the umbrella."

"It's a rain umbrella, not a sun umbrella."

"It still might help."

Harriet sighed. "Then why don't you use it?"

"Because," Ariadne said stiffly, "I needed it to paddle." The waves slip-slopped against the sides of her nest.

"Someone," said Harriet, "should have brought sun block."

Ariadne rolled her eyes. "What do you mean by someone?"

"I mean one of us, you or me, might have thought ahead."

Ariadne shrugged. The cat sat up and shook her dripping paw.

"You want a hard-boiled egg?" Harriet asked.

Ariadne squinted, shading her eyes with her hand. “You have some?”

Harriet’s hands dipped out of sight and came up with four eggs. “Come closer,” she said.

“I’m not really hungry.”

Harriet held up one of the eggs between her thumb and forefinger. She raised her eyebrows.

Ariadne hesitated, then paddled a little closer. Harriet lobbed the egg. It sailed in a high arc, a small oval against the blue sky. Ariadne’s hand flew up and the cat’s paw batted the air, but the egg overshot the nest and splashed into the ocean. It bobbed, suspended just below the surface, then sank slowly out of sight.

Ariadne looked over at Harriet, suddenly uneasy. “Try again,” she urged. “I’m ready.”

Harriet, also shaken, selected another egg and tossed it with care. Ariadne caught it with one hand, the shell smacking against her palm. They looked at each other with relief.

“Thank you,” said Ariadne.

“You’re welcome.” They peeled their eggs.

“No salt,” said Harriet. “Sorry.”

Ariadne reached over the side of the nest and dunked the egg in the water. She shot a wry half-smile over at Harriet.

“Huh,” said Harriet, and dunked her egg, too.

“Seriously,” said Ariadne, biting into the firm yolk.

“You should take the umbrella. Your shoulders look painful.”

“I thought you needed it to paddle.”

“I’m close enough. Take it.”

Harriet looked pointedly at Ariadne’s sunburned chest. “No,” she said.

Ariadne tightened her lips and stared off at the flat line of the horizon. “Stubborn,” she said under her breath. She lifted her hair and blotted the back of her neck with a wad of tissues. She sighed loudly.

“What?”

“My hair. . . it’s hot.”

Harriet considered. “I could braid it.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean it might feel cooler.”

Ariadne studied Harriet’s face. “You don’t have to.”

“I know I don’t have to.”

“All right, then.” She paddled the last few yards. Their nests bumped. The cat leapt from Ariadne’s nest to Harriet’s and began walking the perimeter.

“How can we do this?” asked Ariadne.

“Turn around and sit up on the edge.”

“That won’t work. The nests will drift apart.”

“No, I don’t think so. See? The lichen on the twigs are making them catch on each other.”

Ariadne looked dubiously at the place where the nests met.

“Will you please just do it?” said Harriet.

“I am.”

Ariadne perched, facing inwards. She opened the umbrella with a decisive snap; it bloomed orange above them, shading both of their heads.

“Thank you,” Harriet said grudgingly.

“You’re welcome.” She felt Harriet’s hands divide her hair into three parts, then begin to weave them together. The cat brushed against Ariadne’s back. “Is she in the way?”

“No. She’s good.”

Ariadne let her head fall back, lolling in response to the pull on her scalp. “That feels nice,” she whispered. Tears welled up, startling her.

“It’s past your waist,” said Harriet.

Ariadne cleared her throat. “Foolish,” she said.

“Who, me?”

“No, me. For having it.”

Harriet’s hands stopped. “I love your hair,” she said.

“Why would you say something like that?”

Ariadne wiped her nose on her pajama sleeve. “I don’t know. I’m not myself.”

Harriet’s hands hesitated a moment longer, then resumed braiding. “It’s a little crooked,” she said. “Hope it’s all right.”

“Don’t be silly. Are you done?”

“I have nothing to tie it with.”

Ariadne looked about the nest. She saw a length of string woven into the branches. Pulling it out, she turned to show Harriet.

Harriet was kneeling, the end of the braid held in her hands. The cat sat close beside her. They both looked at Ariadne with big, expectant eyes.

Ariadne laughed. “You two,” she said fondly, holding out the string.

Harriet took it and tied the braid. “Are you liking me now?” she asked.

Ariadne turned herself all the way around and placed her bare feet in Harriet’s nest, in between Harriet’s knees. The nests seesawed up and down as the weight shifted. She held the umbrella high over their heads.

“I didn’t. But now I do.”

“I’m liking you now, too,” said Harriet. Her fingers encircled Ariadne’s ankle, then she slid her hand up under Ariadne’s pajama leg to hold her calf. They smiled at each other.

“I’m starving,” said Ariadne.

“Never fear, my love,” said Harriet. “There’s another egg.”



## No Ark, or J-Town Pastoral

Nickole Brown

—for Mary Oliver

No foxes here.  
Only panting strays,  
alley toms, a pacing,  
bottled, emailed existence,  
even our air  
conditioned,  
vents pointing down  
with a force fierce  
enough to paralyze  
a bouquet of stargazers  
in full, static bloom.

No, no marsh hawks  
either. Maybe a pet  
cockatiel with her dried  
green sprinkle on carpet  
of no consequential color,  
maybe a street robin  
fragile on segmented legs and  
rusted  
breast, or a sparrow, the one  
who kept pecking and pecking  
my window last spring, fighting  
his own reflection—a wife's tale  
of death, asking to come in.

And my first luna moth?  
I was walking, not the woods,  
but to the discount  
grocery. And he was big,  
big as a hamburger,  
half-dead, his electric green  
covering the letter *P* in *No Park*.  
And because I'm no Mary,

he frightened me—four  
drowsy eyes eyeing from  
tattered wings, feathered antenna  
tasting the artifice of  
my air, the limp thistle  
legs that stuck to my fingers  
when I carried him to a safer place,  
well, not *safe*, but at least  
a place where he would be taken  
by beak or tooth and not  
tire.

But what I want to say is  
this: I was frightened,  
I carried him,  
and the bag girl, mentally  
handicapped and happy  
just to have her first job,  
followed me with her rattling train  
of carts and her bright  
red smile. When I set the winged thing  
behind the dumpster, the girl,  
she threw her mouth  
wide,  
giggling and giggling and giggling  
into such long line of

empty carts. I tell you:  
I never knew carts to be so  
empty. Never knew  
how much each resembles a  
cage.

## The Preservationist

### Rachel Curry

The lingering scent of formaldehyde filled Theresa with delight. It reminded her of the fire that had ravaged Boscov's Department Store Warehouse when she was just a girl. Fingers intertwined in her doting grandfather's assiduous grasp. Theresa and Grandfather stood in front of that crackling blaze, as if it were an inglenook assembled entirely for their warmth. She had felt Grandfather's clammy palms tightening around hers while they were engulfed by the mesmerizing fragrance of a thousand burning mannequins.

Theresa acknowledged that her recent inheritance of Grandfather's funeral home possessed, in addition to many other perks, undeniable aromatic benefits. She understood, too, the ceremonial importance of her position; the person directly responsible for enhancing the features of the freshly deceased. The simple words, "He looks so natural," never failed to endow her with a humble joy.

From a young age, Theresa's admiration for artistic expression penetrated the constraints of conventional genres. After all, her interpretation of Munch's *The Scream* received first prize in the replication category at her eighth grade art show. When Theresa presented Grandfather with her blue ribbon and winning painting he traced along her cheekbone with his index finger, which smelled of a unique combination of formaldehyde and Aqua Velva; "A human face will be more difficult to recreate, but... it appears as though you are a natural." Despite this fortuitous omen, however, Theresa's collections remained her truest passion and the source of her greatest pleasure. When the funeral home was finally passed onto her, Theresa was eager to expand the possibilities of what she could collect beyond her wildest imaginings. Another distinctive pleasure, bestowed upon her by Grandfather.

Initially, when Grandfather and Theresa collected butterflies, together, Theresa would nervously move her thumb back and forth over her incisors with her index finger. She felt, instinctively, that something was fundamentally improper with pinning such delicate, mosaic-patterned wings to the stubble-

covered corkboard, but Grandfather insisted. Meticulously sweeping her lustrous locks behind a dainty un-pierced ear, Grandfather would assure her, “Such beautiful creatures are not capable of feeling pain.” Theresa would recoil, cupping her elbows into her palms and pulling them across her small frame. The waft of cherry flavored cough drops lingered on Grandfather’s breath as he whispered; “When their very purpose is to impart pleasure.”

After her first pet fish died, Theresa decided to surprise Grandfather by beginning an entirely new canvas. She felt compelled to kiss her pet tenderly before impaling his psychedelic fins against the coarse cork. Grandfather marveled at her natural creativity and her admiration for things departed. He continued to purchase fish for Theresa with unbridled anticipation of their inevitable demise. With each fatality, Grandfather guided the tips of Theresa’s dutiful fingers across the scaly subjects, encouraging fastidious precision in her pinning form. “All things eventually die,” Theresa would repeat before she fell asleep, “eventually.”

For years Theresa and Grandfather spent time reflecting over the dozens of spectacular canvases they had completed together. It was their commitment to preservation that ascended these brilliantly tinted creatures, once ephemeral, into a world of everlasting permanence. But only after her imperious grandfather’s death could Theresa’s own genius for collecting truly reach its pinnacle, high- art status. She devoted herself to uncovering the artistically infinite possibilities that lay ahead of her, and all was made possible by the addition of each gentleman client that arrived at the funeral home.

Grandfather, naturally, had the honor of being first. Theresa had pondered performing this swift alteration to Grandfather countless times, and just as she had suspected, this final ritual to his unresisting corpse made Grandfather appear more peaceful than he had ever looked when he was alive.

Theresa’s exceptional mortuary work eventually earned her a reputation that stretched far beyond her own small town. She had a special knack for adding a hint of rosiness to skin, sculpting features and rejuvenating aged hands. Theresa felt it both an appropriate and a much-deserved acknowledgement for her name to be synonymous with the beautiful dead. And so her

funeral home was inundated with subjects from neighboring towns, families desperate for the chance to have their loved ones preserved. Of course, Theresa was no ordinary, anachronistic funeral artist. She received a cascade of kudos for her meticulous restorations, and her specific airbrush technique was even featured in the July issue of *Mortuary Management* magazine. She always humbly thanked her adoring public at every wake—as all respectable undertakers should. Theresa served as dutiful diplomat to the harmless dead.

Theresa kept secret the true reason that her clients—those who were anatomically eligible of course—looked almost unbearably serene at their debut. It was her recondite collection! And any time Theresa began to feel a tinge of uneasiness about her collecting, she calmed herself by stating: “All great masters had their secrets.” In turn, the increased exigency of her mortuary work pleasantly served to heighten the zeal for her latest collection. An incredible union had been generated with the recent amalgamation of Theresa’s day job alongside her newest canvas.

Eventually, Theresa decided to leave her small apartment and took up the funeral home as her permanent residence. Natural progressions. Theresa thoroughly explored the grounds, hunting for the perfect space to relocate her collection. After rediscovering the possibilities of a spacious warehouse basement—a concrete treasure chest—Theresa knew she had finally uncovered a gallery that was worthy of displaying her past and present collections. At the end of each work day Theresa would skip down the musky steps to her gallery and spend at least an hour or more gazing upon, if not actually adding to, her newest and most prized canvas. The fact that it began with Grandfather made it even more meaningful to her. She was confident in her subjects’ inherent complicity with her task, certain of their approval. She could tell by the way their lips had looked so pleasantly relaxed at their debuts. “Each gentleman seems to be breathing a little sigh of relief only I can hear,” she thought on more than one occasion. If only this omniscience served to enlighten Theresa as to who had died when. Both corpse restoration and collecting were duties that depended on providential circumstances quite beyond her control. She supposed that her patience was a worthy

occupational hazard. She would cock her head and imagine Grandfather uttering his favorite phrase: “No honor lies in sentimentalizing little might-have-beens.” Theresa smiled. Anticipation is a blessing.

## Southern Music

**Elizabeth Bradfield**

—*for Arctic Explorer Donald B. MacMillan*

The choir on stage facing the audience,  
not turned to each other. No interrupting laughter. You  
in plush seat, aware of money paid and thus how much  
attention is due. Voices drawn through thin  
pipes and shaped in the mouth's nave,  
not growl-deep in sound. How blank

their faces, stiff their silk. How fixed to notes  
arranged by some distant, unrelated hand.

You drift. Miriam nudges. But she's impatient, too.

Your records from Greenland are rough, warped. I don't  
believe  
you made them just for science. Home, I bet you stood

with Miriam on your polar bear rug, fire cracking in the  
hearth,  
hands on each other's elbows, eyes on each other's eyes,  
and opened your throats, sound surging like water between  
you.

I bet you allowed yourself the comfort of breath  
as well as breath's outrush becoming song. Mac,  
you filled your body with the sounds of women  
at least once, didn't you?

## Losses

### Elizabeth Bradfield

—*for Arctic Explorer Donald B. MacMillan*

Mac, when you lived in Greenland  
or Nain, did anyone take themselves  
from the changing world?

Louisa has killed herself.  
Her cousin, my friend,  
has flown home to Iqaluit

from Germany, where he lives  
with the girlfriend he met while studying  
at Columbia. Think of his journey.

We measure the pollen shift  
in ice cores. Hunting and whaling stats  
were gathered early and kept well. Ships

logged each arrival and departure.  
But the lives of girls  
have always been hard to see.

Not many, if we're being honest, have tried.  
And now Louisa, like Lucy, like  
Susie, like Hope is gone.



## **My Grandmother Defrosts the Freezer**

**Elizabeth Bradfield**

Every Thursday evening  
the walls melt back, recede  
again to metal. She has read about ice

and its dangers: wrecking ball in the sea,  
thief of nimbleness, roadway trickster. Was it  
her daughter or her son who took her to Alaska?

Drips sound in a pan, and she tries to recall  
ice she has seen, glaciers easing down  
mountain flanks as slow rivers,

their crack and shift, all scraped bare  
in their wake. A terrifying absence.  
She empties the melt pan, pulls a wedge of frost

from one wall and runs it under water,  
her fingers confused by temperature  
and the quick loss of what she holds.

## **Daughters of Bilitis Downunder**

### **Jean Taylor**

It's a matter of lesbian herstory that Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were founding members of Daughters of Bilitis that was established in San Francisco in 1955. DOB provided a supportive environment for its members and published an informative newsletter, *The Ladder*, which eventually reached many thousands of lesbians across the US. DOB went on to become a significant and militant lesbian organisation whose members went on marches to publicise their cause and were outspoken in their advocacy for lesbian rights till the group eventually folded in the late 1970s.

In the meantime, news of DOB had reached Australia and in 1969 two lesbians in Melbourne, Claudia Pierce (later Contessini) and Marion Paull, wrote independently of each other to DOB asking about setting up a similar lesbian organisation in Australia. After DOB in the U.S. had put them in touch with each other, Claudia and Marion met and together with several other lesbians established Daughters of Bilitis in Melbourne as an affiliate of DOB in the U.S. DOB held meetings at the DOB Clubrooms, (also Marion's home), where the members held political discussions about Stonewall and related lesbian matters.

By early 1970, the Melbourne Chapter of DOB began producing their own Newsletter to keep members up to date and informed. The four Purposes of DOB were reprinted from *The Ladder* and ended with the words, "Join DOB today and help make the gay world a better place to live in." In order to attract new members the group advertised their PO Box number and put ads in *The Age* and were willing to be interviewed by the media. An article, "The Forbidden Love," featured in *The Sunday Observer* on 19 July 1970. One of the early members, Francesca Curtis, (also the Editor of the Newsletter), was the first out lesbian to be seen on TV when she was interviewed on The Bailey File by Tania Haylesworth in July 1970.

However, when it became obvious that DOB in the US was a militant organisation and its members went on street marches wearing t-shirts bearing the words "Butch" and "Dyke" some members were concerned about the adverse publicity and

voted to disassociate itself. After a great deal of debate, the organisation changed its name to the Australasian Lesbian Movement in July 1970, as was mentioned in the Editorial of ALM Newsletter no. 7 August 1970:

The big news this month is the severing of the umbilical cord with our Mother Organisation... After much discussion members have decided to drop the title DOB and from now on we will be known as the Australasian Lesbian Movement or simply ALM.

It was a busy month all round for us and our first big step was the face to face television interview on The Bailey File. This brought in many letters from people wanting more information. As a result we now have some new members and others who are interested in joining.

Phyllis Papps was one of those who saw Francesca's TV interview, and after contacting DOB she went to a function for prospective members and became a member. The first time Phyllis met openly gay womyn was at her first DOB meeting and it wasn't long before she and Francesca started a relationship which was still going strong 41 years later in 2011.

The ALM aimed to change society's attitudes towards lesbians and was run by an elected committee. Marion was the first president of the ALM, Claudia was the secretary and the phone contact person, (fifty percent of calls were local, the rest came from all over the place, including Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa/New Zealand), till the annual general meeting in November 1970 when Francesca became the President (and stopped doing the Newsletter), Claudia the vice president and Phyllis the Secretary. These four significant lesbians were more than willing to be out and take a stand on behalf of lesbians but others in the group were not prepared to 'come out' so openly because of the possible repercussions this public exposure would have on their families and their work life.

After Marion and then Claudia left to be involved in the Women's Liberation Movement, Francesca and Phyllis became the mainstays of the organisation. They felt they were on a mission to get the message out that being gay was okay and were excited about going on the TV programs and addressing local groups. Francesca and Phyllis and others in the ALM were interviewed by Peter Couchman on the TV show, *This Day Tonight*, because they felt strongly that they had to stand up and

say they were lesbians to help those who were unable to come to terms with the fact that they were gay. As mentioned in the *ALM Newsletter* September 1970:

Channel 2 sent a team from This Day Tonight to speak to members willing to appear on television. We could only scrape up three. Most of the others appear to have great feelings of ambivalence. We know there are problems concerning work, relations and friends with all of us, but can we afford not to go on now?

Thanks to television and newspaper publicity, letters have continued to pour in from all over Victoria. How tragic it is to read about the number of Lesbians who have lived in loneliness and isolation for so long. We hope to be able to communicate with them in some way.

What these lesbians were doing was courageous and although they didn't realise it at the time it was herstory in the making. As a result of the publicity ALM attracted a lot more members who worked in a variety of jobs as business womyn, nurses, office womyn, teachers, factory workers and students.

ALM organised lots of activities for its members including bingo, outings to the country, picnics, parties, volley ball games and Sunday functions. The social side was important but so too was being out and maintaining a profile in the community to attract new members. Francesca and Phyllis were a small core of committed political activists who were pro-active and gave talks to the Lions Club and other community groups about what they were doing.

Phyllis and Francesca stepped down from being office bearers at the AGM in August 1971 because by that time their political views were in the minority as most of the members only wanted to socialise and were not interested in being out. ALM continued to meet and socialise with no less than five get-togethers during the month of October 1971 including a barbecue down at the beach, a Folk Night of music and wine, cheese and sausage and a boat trip on the Bay.

By the end of 1972, after a year of social functions, parties, bingo and coffee, drama, games, raffles and meetings the ALM had run its course. The last *ALM Newsletter* no 28 November 1972 advertised the emergency meeting for 13 December where the few members who were left agreed to close

the ALM and after subscriptions of new members had been reimbursed the balance of the bank account was distributed to various charities. Apologising for the format of the meagre newsletter the president added: "We give you instead THE DUNCAN STORY without comment and attached hereto." What followed was a detailed account of Dr. George Duncan's death and the evidence at his inquest (the Adelaide University law lecturer, targeted because he was gay, was thrown into the River Torrens in South Australia in May 1972 and drowned).

The tragedy of this story is not that Duncan died but that he had to die before a state government took a closer look at their criminal code and changed it. It will be a greater tragedy if the other states have to wait for their own Duncans before they too review their criminal codes.

A small public notice was included in *The Age* 23 February 1973: "Australasian Lesbian Movement closed Dec 1972."

This is just a brief account of the first lesbian organisation, (also the first gay group), in Australia to openly work towards changing homophobic attitudes and to give its members the opportunity to feel they were worthwhile members of society. During the three years it was in operation DOB / ALM not only supported its many members and put lesbians in touch with each other but because the organisation went out of its way to take a political stand on behalf of all lesbians, its members were the courageous pioneers of the lesbian visibility we enjoy today.

### **Sources:**

- *DOB / ALM Newsletters: 1970 - 1972*
- Taped interview with Phyllis Papps and Francesca Curtis by members of the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA), Liz Ross, Gary Jaynes and Graham Willett, on 10 January 2008.
- *Brazen Hussies: Herstory of Radical Lesbian Feminism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria 1970 - 1979*, Jean Taylor, Dyke Books, Melbourne, 2009

## **Fourteen**

**Linda Quinlan**

Behind your house  
trains rolled over our pennies.  
Flattened onto your rooftop  
we'd watch  
the sun wrinkled Mystic Bridge  
safe among the graveled stones  
and molting pigeons.

We'd invent ancient rituals  
built on ones from the week before.  
Mothers haunt the poems we write.  
Fathers yell for us from the street  
we are late for dinner.

We leap over buildings  
so quickly  
the light dances on the tar  
and shadows split apart  
with the ache of leaving.

## **Chelsea, MA**

### **Linda Quinlan**

This as her February birth  
my Aunt Evy swayed with every half tone  
the spontaneous steps of a child  
living outside Newfoundland  
the fishing village of her family's past.

This wasn't New Orleans  
where she might have had a chance  
where anger and creativity collide  
but this was Chelsea  
a city of bad daughters  
and warlike sons,  
where nothing grew  
but immigrants and hunger.

Her father's madness  
beckoned him to an ocean death  
but instead he crawled into dementia  
soaked in beer  
the smell of urine even when he slept.

My aunt married one summer  
a man back from the war in Europe.  
His pale violence  
swelling out of every room  
made her a ghost.

She danced at home  
over the kitchen tile that curled in the corners.  
She danced in circles  
while her daughter slept.

Until he took their child away  
punishing her dance  
commanded a beat from the suburbs  
and snapped his fingers

30 Sinister Wisdom 84 – Time/Space

again and again  
until even her suicide  
seemed clumsy.



## **Puerta Vallarta Mexico**

**Linda Quinlan**

The bats are already flying  
though the sun over the jungle  
shows sunset villas  
in half shades of light and dark.  
The river below gurgles in pools  
shallow from up here  
and the song of the dead  
clings to my clothes  
and my arms smell of my mother  
a sweaty factory smell  
and Sharon who never left New Orleans  
dead two years now  
looks out through my eyes.

An iguana  
turns the color of the terracotta roof.  
This is my angry fantasy,  
the feel of sand that burns your feet  
until you reach the water  
with long progressive strides,  
but you always have to return  
both remembering and forgetting  
the burn, the actual footsteps that brought you here.  
My friend greets ma at the gate  
under the brick Spanish arch.  
The classic bell on top that does not ring  
and we move forward together  
into his dream house.

## **A New Orleans Farewell**

**Linda Quinlan**

You left me an African mask  
left me  
left me  
to enter the Please U Café  
on lower St. Charles  
bacon grease settling on my skin  
where short round waitresses  
older than we  
leave work swiftly  
on a washed out Saturday night,  
where tourists wander streets they shouldn't,  
Erato, Tchoupitoulas, Clio  
past Charity Hospital  
where a half broken banana tree  
slaps at the heat of July  
making not a bit of difference to anyone  
and I can't remember you there  
no Mardi Gras beads around your neck  
no music to sell  
lying in a hallway gurney  
stomach so bloated  
that tears are orphans here  
and the stifling air has no arms  
so I carry your ashes  
to the Mississippi River  
and remember to be an outlaw  
to ripple through people's lives  
with a soft rebellious wave.

**mid(night) swim****Margarita Miniovich**

(yes)terday      yes      good      as      night      yes  
 toget(her)      (ah)gain pl(ease)  
 oh      that      dance      that      da da da ance  
 more      (muse)sic      than      (eve)ver      (be)fore  
 (oh)cean      deep      hunger      here      I am  
 (oh)range      rain      (be)tween      you      are      mine  
 (i)s(land)      (or)chid      (blue)ness      in      me  
 (sin)ce you      to(ouch)      (today)ness of now  
 (oh)pen up      minutes      to      (yea)rs  
 swim      (in)side      splashing      (more)ning dew  
 rub      my      scales      smooth shine      silver      then  
 steer      my      tail      in      all      four      directions  
 we      fall      (as)sleep      silent      fin      to      fin

## Sketch in “D” Minor

### Margarita Miniovich

Lina called last night. To ask for my definition of *destiny*. She was writing another paper for her philosophy class, doing a survey on the differences in the definition of destiny between men and women. Too many *d*'s as far as I'm concerned. But I was flattered to be included in her *woman* sample. Usually, she doesn't know what to call me.

“Uhhmm, this is Vida, my sister,” she says, her eyes shifting left/ right.

“*Sister*” barely audible.

“You had such nice hair, why did you cut it off?” “You had such nice skirts, why don't you wear them anymore?” “Gary was nice, why did you leave him?”

Everything “nice” in past tense.

*D* for doors. Shut. “Destiny,” I told her, “is being born with small tits.”

Lee had small breasts. She said it was great, that way she didn't sweat under her breasts in the summer. It wasn't true. In the summer (on our bed, on the floor, against a kitchen counter), I would find her breasts with my hands, my mouth, kiss her wet salty skin, the nipples getting hard on my tongue, like Hershey's kisses. Her hair, long and curly, drops of sweat on her neck. Her hands on my back, gripping, her hips dancing circles. She came with her open mouth pressed to mine. She liked it when I kissed the tip of her nose.

She called me “my Vida,” meaning *life*, and I called her “my one and onLee,” meaning a pun.

Last night, after talking with Lina, I sat at my kitchen table and thought about all the *d* words that had come to mind.

*Ding dong, dyke, delusion, depression, dilapidated, dull, dukhobors, Dostoyevsky, dawn, dead.*

I went to bed and couldn't stop. *Dilute, drek, Duracell, distended, dope, dat's it folks, don't.*

Lee came to me in a dream in the early morning. This hasn't happened in seven months. She sat in the big green armchair in our living room. I came in. Her hair was cropped short and she'd gained weight. I was crying in the doorway. She

looked right at me. I wanted to run to her, but my feet wouldn't move. I just stood there, frozen, with my arms stretched out to her. She kept getting bigger and bigger. I took one step forward and she *became* the green armchair. I woke up thirsty, with my eyes dry.

Lee hated that green chair. She said it had hard bumps and hurt her back. She used to rub the sore spot with her hands, after sitting in it for a while. I never noticed the bumps myself.

Lee had beautiful hands. Long chiseled fingers, soft palms. She didn't bite her nails. She played my grandmother's old piano, her hands - birds, flying, singing above the white and black stripes. Only when she was alone. And only sometimes, for me, when I asked her, kissing her fingers.

"I can't sleep, just one *leettle* song, a *leettle leelabye, please.*"

She couldn't read music but had perfect pitch and played everything by ear. Her favorites, for some strange reason, were old Jewish songs. She was Catholic by birth. She'd pick up a melody from me humming it once in the kitchen while I was making pancakes. She played *Tumbalalaika* well enough to bring tears to my dead grandmother's eyes. She even knew the words. I don't know how. I was always too busy to ask.

"Oh Vi!" she called me when she was happy. "Oye Vey!" she called me when she was very happy.

After Lee, I sold the piano for three hundred bucks through the *Buy & Sell*. Lina didn't want it.

I had met Lee in a phone booth on a corner of Yonge and Wellesley. I had a lunch date with Lina that afternoon and she was twenty minutes late. Very alarming for Lina, who is never late for anything. I called my answering machine to see if she'd left a message. Sure enough, Lina had called: "Sorry, sweetie, I have to cancel. I have to T.A. this afternoon, old Friesen is sick again. I called this morning, but missed you. Hope you get this message in time to make other plans. Talk to you soon." I hung up feeling stood up. I had no other plans and that was my day off. I stepped out of the booth, squinting from the bright sun. I was hungry.

"Excuse me." I heard a woman's voice behind me. I turned around.

"I'm sorry, but do you have an extra quarter? I have to make a call and I don't have any change. I feel really foolish asking this."

She was about my age, slim legs in faded blue jeans, black t-shirt, small breasts, a sea of dark curls to her shoulders, dark eyes, embarrassed smile.

“Oh, yes. Just a minute.” My voice sounded an octave higher than normal. I coughed. I reached into my knapsack, searching for my wallet. My thick leather daybook fell out. We both bent down to pick it up, both said sorry, laughed, both got up too quickly, with the book still on the ground. I got a quarter from my wallet, gave it to her.

“Don’t worry, it happens to me all the time. I just don’t have the guts to ask anybody.” I couldn’t take my eyes off her face. She had a few freckles on her nose.

“Thank you so much. It’s about a job. I have to call to see if I got it. I can’t really call them collect, you know.” She bent down and picked up my daybook.

“Here.”

“Thanks.”

I wished that I had taken a shower that morning. My palms felt sweaty.

“No, thank *you*. O.K. I gotta go. Bye.”

“See you later.”

She walked into the phone booth and shut the glass door. I stood not knowing what to do. I had forgotten where I was going. Then I remembered that I wasn’t going anywhere. I walked to the side of the phone booth and took my time stuffing the book into my knapsack, putting the wallet back in, zipping up the bag, fixing my socks, my shoelaces. I didn’t look at her. Couldn’t. I wanted her to get that job. Wanted to ask her to have lunch with me. I was more hungry than ever. The door opened and she walked out quickly, without looking in my direction. She crossed the street and disappeared into the subway entrance. I saw the back of her head in a crowd. A black dot, with curls like the tail of a comet behind her.

Is destiny - connecting all the dots in the right order, in the *only possible* order? What if one of the dots disappears? Gets wiped out. Rubbed off. Lost. Irretrievably. Is that also destiny? And what are you supposed to do then - the connection to the next dot is impossible, it has been severed. All movement forward aborted. You are left with one leg raised and nowhere to plant it, the leg getting heavier by the second, starting to tremble

from strain, from fighting gravity. You are left with your mouth open, a breath, a word, only half exhaled, the other half still in your lungs, growing like a tumor.

You are left.

I stood on that street corner and felt dizzy. Paralyzed. Heavy. Black behind my eyes as if I were going blind. I didn't know then what I know now: the way you start is the way you finish. With very few exceptions. And I was never exceptional in anything. With maybe one exception. Making love to Lee.

A week after the phone booth, I ran into Lee again, in a downtown bar. She was dancing alone on a semi-empty dance floor, wearing the same black t-shirt. Her long pale arms were like white wings, circling, embracing herself. Totally unselfconscious. A bird in flight. The kind of bird that crashes into glass thinking it's the sky. I had to save her. Catch her.

Lina never liked Lee. At first I thought it was because I joked incessantly about how she'd set us up by canceling that lunch on me. But she always corrected me by saying that Lee had left that afternoon, without even turning around. In an almost celebratory tone of voice. I knew that Lina was panicking. It was one thing to have a sister who occasionally slept with women and quite another to have a sister with a live-in woman lover.

"I don't care who you sleep with," she used to say. "I just care that we don't lose each other in the process."

I tried to explain to her that Lee or any other woman, for that matter, could never take her place. That sisterhood, history, blood and love were different things. That she, Lina, was in my blood, in every cell of my body, necessary as air, inerascable, as permanent as crazy glue; and love was, well, as rare as a black swan, as running into a peacock in a bank line. I'd be crazy not to stare, not to want to touch, to have. Lina said she understood, and of course, she didn't want to stop me from being happy, she was thrilled for me, but still found every excuse to avoid coming over to our house. We never had the food she wanted to eat - we had to meet downtown; our place was too smoky - we had to go to a park.

"Lina, I'm so in love, my skin sings!"

“That’s nice, Vid, but did she have to move in after two weeks? And all those paint fumes are toxic. You smoke too much as it is. And you’ve had weak lungs since you were little.”

Lee and Lina met for the first time at my thirtieth birthday party. Almost six months after Lee and I got involved. Lina, in a cream silk shirt, diamond studs in her ears. Lee, in an emerald velvet jacket (with loose threads at the sleeves) she found for 50 cents at a garage sale that morning. I introduced them as soon as Lina walked in. Lee hugged her.

“So, you’re the famous sister.”

“And you are the famous.....Lee.” Strained laughter.

Lee: “My name is the beginning of yours.”

Lina: “Your name is the beginning of a lot of things.” Up/down with her eyelashes.

Lee afterwards to me, in bed: “You two are definitely sisters. She flirts as well as you.”

Me to Lee: “I taught her.”

Lina afterwards to me, on the phone: “You two have only been together for a month and she’s already acting like I’m family.”

Me to Lina: “But you are.”

She again, “What does she do for a living anyway? And don’t tell me she’s a painter, I mean *for a living*.”

Me: “She’s a painter.”

*Distance. Drip dry. Decapitation. Dashboard. Down. Deserve. Desire. Dear Abby. Detract. Doodle. Damn. Denial. Doremifasolatio.*

She painted huge canvases full of faces - red, purple, black and silver. She hung them on the walls of our small apartment and the place always smelled like paint. We could never make love standing up because we couldn’t lean against the walls. There was always a pair of huge wet eyes staring out at us, trying to dry.

Every couple of weeks she would take old paintings down to a crammed storage room in the basement, and put new ones up on our walls. I always knew something was wrong when she left the same ones hanging for a month.

“I can’t see, you know, I just can’t see anything,” she’d say then. And eat chocolate for breakfast. We always had at least six Mars Bars in the fridge.

Then, one day, I would come home and hear her playing the piano. I would make a lot of noise with my keys



outside the door, the music would stop, and I'd find Lee sitting on the floor, cross-legged, casually flipping through the *TV Guide*. I wouldn't say anything, wouldn't want to embarrass her.

That night she would take down an old painting, put a clean canvas in its place, and with her dark hair splattered silver she would come to bed smelling of acrylic and chocolate. She painted faces on my back with her tongue, until I turned over. She kissed my lips and her fingers played melodies on my body that would have made my grandmother roll over in her grave.

*Dolce Vida.* That's what she called me when her lips were still wet with me.

She despised my job. I have worked as a typesetter in the same print shop for five years. The pay was good, I liked most of the people there, and I didn't mind the work.

"We only live once," she used to say, a wet paintbrush in her hand, sleeves rolled up. "And you're wasting yourself in a meaningless routine." Her eyes looking straight into mine. "You think the world is a better place because you can typeset some asshole's resume faster than anyone else? So he could get a job and become rich, and buy another house and another car and watch TV and drink beer and beat his wife in his spare time?"

"Why is he, whoever he is, necessarily an asshole?" I would ask, knowing that's not the point, but hating to lose an argument.

"You love taking pictures. You're good at it. You even look different when you do it, alive or something, I don't know. Pink-cheeked. Why don't you do it?" Lee would get back to the point. "You have to do what you love. We all do," she'd say, dipping her brush into deep burgundy.

I would crawl on all fours towards her, grab her by her ankle, kiss her leg all the way up to the warm space between her thighs.

"I *am* doing what I love," I'd say looking up at her. She'd shake her head, not smiling, but wouldn't move away. Just drop the paintbrush into a bucket on the floor. And close her eyes.

*Dew drop. Darling. Drop darling. Definite drop.*

I came home at 7 every night, usually too tired to stay up for a movie she'd rented. She loved thrillers. But always covered her eyes with her hands in scary parts. I fell asleep with

my head on her lap, somewhere in the middle of the film, lulled by her breathing, her warm belly rising and falling near my face.

A dot size is relative to the distance of your eyes, your face, to it. The closer your skin gets to it, the larger it is. Sometimes as large as your life.

*Dream doll. Doll dream.*

Lee worked part-time in a little gallery around the corner from our place. The pay wasn't enough for rent, let alone her paints and canvases, but she loved it. She didn't mind my supporting both of us, and I didn't either.

Destiny - what if a dot fades? To blankness. Nothing drastic happens. It starts to disappear slowly; the change in the intensity of color and shape barely noticeable, from one day to the next. One day to the next.

"Lee, you haven't painted anything in two weeks. What's wrong?" I throw my knapsack by the door. To free my arms for a hug.

"Nothing." Her body unyielding. Still in her pajamas. Her curls flat. Sleep in the corner of her eye.

"You want to go for some Greek food?"

"I'm not hungry."

Half an hour later eating a Mars bar, drinking black coffee. An empty pack of cigarettes on the kitchen table. Her eyes away from me. Looking towards the open window and the green branches of an elm tree in the front yard.

One day to the next.

How many times have I thought of hanging a close-up photograph of me on those green, disinterested branches. My face dancing to the wind. Her eyes through the window following my rhythm. Focused only on my face. My eyes smiling at her, soothing, seducing, taking her in. Wholly mine. Even for a moment.

And then, one night you go to bed and stretch your arm across the top of the pillow next to yours, the way you had done for the past four years. Expecting to wind your fingers through the pile of warm curls. Because that's what you do before you fall asleep. And your fingers clutch at air, at nothingness, just above that pillow. Your fingers suspended, rigamortized, disembodied. The dot has disappeared. You had not noticed it earlier, at dinner. You could have sworn it was there. Earlier at

dinner. You had broccoli surprise. Big chunks of tuna and diced tomatoes. Whole wheat bread. Not toasted. You could have sworn the dot was there, it was just a regular Tuesday night, water running, dishes being done. You went to take your daily vitamins and all the glasses were clean, bottoms up on the shelves, just the way you like them. Brushed your teeth, flossed, moisturized your face. You could have sworn you knew your next step. Bed, pillow, warm curls, sleep.

“Talk to me, damn it!” All the windows wide open. Hot August evening. Air still.

“I don’t know what to say, Vida.” Quietly. Her cigarette ashes falling on the carpet. She doesn’t look down.

“Are you unhappy?”

Silence.

“Is it us?”

Silence.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I don’t know! Just leave me alone! I don’t know. You’re always on top of me, what’s wrong, honey, what’s wrong!” Butts out her cigarette. Leaves the room. Bathroom door slams. Water running.

“Get your own life, stop living mine!” Her voice distorted through running water or tears. I can’t tell.

I call Lina from a pay phone outside. “No, nothing is wrong. I just wanted to see you, that’s all. It’s been a while, you know. Yeah, Lee is fine. She’s busy painting a new thing and wanted the place to herself tonight. Yeah, a movie sounds great.”

I don’t fall asleep in the middle of that film. I don’t fall asleep at all. I get home, sit in the green armchair and smoke until the room lightens with the first sun. Then I get up and walk into our bedroom. Lee is sleeping, her breathing even, her closed eyelids trembling slightly as from a bright light. I go back to the green chair and light another cigarette.

“Sorry, Vi. I’m really really sorry about last night.” Lee’s arms around my neck. Her lips warm and dry on my cheek. The kitchen smells of pasta. We eat. Together. For the first time in a couple of months.

“I love you, Lee.” I say. “I want you to be happy. Tell me what I can do to make you happy? To make it like it was before?”

I don’t know before what.

“Vi, sometimes I feel like I’m a bird. And one of my feet is tied with a thick rope. To a big cement post. And I can’t fly away. No matter how hard I try. And I need to fly. To feel my wings alive, you know? That’s how I feel - that life itself is that rope. And I’m too chicken to chew my leg off, like a wolf.”

I notice all the mixed metaphors. I’m so cold my lungs ache.

“I have to do something. Change something. I don’t know. I just can’t live like this anymore.”

She’s crying. Looking right at me. Her eyes are like dark wet amber.

That night we make love for the last time. It feels like the first.

At the end she said she was tired, couldn’t see colors anymore, the damn piano was out of tune, has been for ages, couldn’t I hear?, couldn’t stand my fingers in her hair at night, I got her hair all tangled up, didn’t know if she still loved me, didn’t know if she could love anyone right now, needed her own space, was sorry....

She slept in the green armchair for the next eleven nights, until she found a place. I didn’t ask if her back ached.

After she left, Lina came to stay with me for a week. She cleaned out the storage room of all the old paintings and put an ad in the *Buy & Sell* for the piano. She wanted to sell the green chair as well, but I didn’t let her. We both avoided the *L* words, like *love* or *Lee*. I called Lina *hey*, and she understood why.

*Damp days dance Dante’s defiant darkness. Division. Dissent. Disease. Dislocation. Dismal. Dislodge. Dragon.*

Destiny is a wet face on the wall staring at you from across the room. The face that never dries. Made up of myriad of dots. Sometimes I think that one dot missing doesn’t change the essence of the face. But sometimes I can’t see anything but that empty space. My next step/stop unknown. The painter gone.

## That Day

### Julie Cooper-Fratrik

*After awhile, Virginia put down the duster and slipped away.*

*James King  
Virginia Woolf*

After the weight of stones  
disturbs the river's calm, circles  
of water spread outward, as small  
at first as minnows gasping for air.

In town, the tower clock strikes one:  
its circles of sound surround  
the water meadows, the lowing  
of cattle, plaintive and pure as rain.

*There would the dead leaf fall,  
when the leaves fall,  
in the water.*

From the hedge, a redstart calls.  
Rhododendrons shiver. A man lays down  
his pruning shears; his feet move imperceptibly  
toward the house. Along the river bottom,  
minnows feed.

\*Quoted stanza from Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*

## **The Girl with Violets in Her Lap**

**Jocelyn Heath**

I knew the flowers  
in her lap, overflowing  
the basket of her fingers,

their green spade leaves  
buried under purple.  
I knew the violet glow

against the underside  
of her breasts, the light  
of so many flowers

against skin,  
petals thick in the vale  
between her thighs.

Spring violets,  
white and lilac and purple.  
I knew her, Sappho,

before I found your fragments—  
the unspeakable excerpted  
by time or hands—and I find her,

beautiful bride  
with violets in her lap,  
in her chamber prior to dressing.

Readying herself  
for one lost to time,  
whose fragment wore away

and set her center on the page  
for me to find.  
You, coveted in a poet's words,

woman bright with petals,  
I have known but never seen  
until flowers fluttered off the page,

and then you—  
naming the want of Lesbos—  
two thousand years escape my breast.

## **Tower**

### **Jocelyn Heath**

One red bloom  
with petals of a child's fingertip's breadth  
suspended by a broken trellis over

a concrete square stained with rust,  
beside the brief slope flecked  
with dust and mica bordering

a kingdom around a vine-wrapped tower.  
The blue ribbed doll blanket laid out on a corner  
makes a bed. In the beach bucket,

we stir a goulash of leaves and dirt.  
My friend imagines that she is a prince  
and we lie down,

the double yellow center of the rose  
above us an eye leaning ever closer.



## **Coastal**

### **Joanna Cattonar**

sea lions and harbor seals  
iridescent as rain

brown bellies a sea  
breathing waves

sleep on each other  
like this

all shoulders  
all humming skin

**Dawn**

**Joanna Cattonar**

down  
in the cup  
above  
your lip

shines

the curve  
of your back  
arches

in my hand

dark wet  
petals  
swaying  
on a stem

## **Morning**

**Joanna Cattonar**

I wake  
with my hand  
on your sex

and the moan begun  
in my dream  
pours into my heart

## **Excerpt from *Beggar of Love***

### **Lee Lynch**

Ginger wasn't coming back this time, Jefferson felt it. She didn't blame Ginger, but for the final break to come over a mistake, a misunderstanding—the pain of it pummeled her. She'd only gone to Shirley's room to finish apologizing and to get to know her without sex hanging them up. Then they walked around the corner to the coffee shop as Jefferson had originally planned, as she told Ginger she would. She was bursting with herself when she got home.

"I'm home, Ginge! I really had a good time seeing Shirley," she'd planned to tell Ginger. "Talked and laughed with her without once feeling like I had to seduce her." It was so good to be free of the compulsion to get physical with a woman. She'd finally unloaded some of her guilt. For so long she carried it around in an imaginary old cloth sack she dragged by its drawstring closure everywhere she went.

She'd bounded up the stairs instead of waiting for the slow elevator, unlocked the door to the apartment, and went in, panting, smiling, ready to shout, "I'm free!" First she'd stopped drinking; now she knew she was serious about being faithful. They'd celebrate with a bottle of sparkling cranberry juice.

"Ginger?" she'd called into the hollow-sounding apartment, startled when the refrigerator made the clunking sound that signaled a defrost cycle.

She could hear Ginger's heavy Bronx accent as she read the note Ginger had left. "I ran into Elisa from Hunter," it said, "at the recital. She saw you at the Hotel August in the elevator with another woman. You promised I wouldn't have to endure this again. I should have known better. This time I'm really done."

Since then she'd heard nothing. Ginger's Aunt Tilly had barred her from Ginger's dance school. None of their friends had heard from Ginger. Jefferson couldn't sleep; the line between consciousness and unconsciousness became more and more thin. So here she was, on a personal stakeout, spending

winter break watching Ginger's dance school for signs of her. In years past, waiting to meet Ginger, she'd gotten friendly with the waitresses in the restaurant where she now sat hunkered in her worn brown leather bomber jacket by the window, and they kept the coffee coming as she watched across the snow for a chance to explain that, this time, she hadn't strayed. If she'd lost Ginger again, what had been the sense of getting sober and staying away from other women? She ran both hands through her hair, combing it back. Oh, sure, at the program they'd tell her she'd done it for herself, but who was she without Ginger?

She'd always loved the city in the snow. It tamped down the noise, the traffic, the hustle. The snow was deep enough that each infrequent vehicle drove in the tracks of the last one. Everything wore a clean icy tarp about two inches thick. Buses were sparse and no passengers waited at the stop down the block. New York was as much at peace as she'd experienced it since the last blackout.

The next blow came like a roaring avalanche. A car pulled up outside the Dance Loft and Ginger, bundled in the pouffy coat with the fake fur collar Jefferson had given her last year, hurried to it, wheeling her huge green suitcase. Their gay friend Mitchell Para got out and opened the trunk. She'd never thought to call him.

He hugged Ginger, long and tight, then loaded the suitcase while Ginger went back to the doorway for—oh, no, she thought. All her luggage? What was going on? Mitchell was following Ginger now, shadowing her, not six inches away, his arms outlining her, as if to protect her or to shepherd her to the building. Ginger's face looked like it belonged on an injured athlete, the pain was so obvious. Was she sick? No, you didn't haul four suitcases to a hospital. Had one of her brothers fallen at a building site? No, that didn't make sense either. Four suitcases? Had she packed every one of her prized collection of flip-flops?

Mitchell opened the door for Ginger and then got in the driver's seat. Jefferson should have been lunging out of the restaurant to catch Ginger, but she sat there and watched Mitchell lay his arm across Ginger's shoulders, draw her to him and kiss her. Jefferson stood, but within seconds, all she could see of them was the roof of the car, darting into a side street.

Breathless with shock, she stepped outside and looked for a taxi. But Ginger could be going anywhere: Mitchell’s place, out of the city, out of state, out of the country. She imagined herself foolishly shouting, “Follow that car!” and lowered her arm. She slumped against the bare little tree beside her, a ginkgo she’d watched city workers plant two years ago. She clearly wasn’t wanted on Ginger’s voyage. Ginger had every right not to wait around for an explanation after so many of Jefferson’s lies.

She charged across the street and through the gate of Ginger’s Washington Heights Dance Loft. It was the only building in the area with chain-link fencing around it; with its red stone walls, it resembled a little armory. Despite the weight she’d been putting on for the last ten years, again she sprang up the flight of wooden steps two at a time to the second floor. Ginger’s two instructors were holding classes. Aunt Tilly was at the reception desk. Jefferson placed her hands flat on the desk and waited in silence until the old woman looked up. Still formidable, she had to be in her eighties by now. She’d retired as a school secretary and come to work part-time when Ginger’s enrollment ballooned.

“You need to leave,” she told Jefferson. “Ginger doesn’t want to see you.”

Jefferson was streaming sweat and unzipped her leather jacket. “Where did she go?”

“I’m not at liberty to say.” Aunt Tilly averted her eyes.

Aisha was a student who had started taking lessons at the Neighborhood House, where Ginger first taught. A hefty, clumsy, but determined adolescent back in modern-dance classes, Aisha now emerged from the classroom where she taught modern dance herself. Jefferson always thought of Aisha as an elongated butterfly who had emerged from her cocoon of baby fat. Several preschoolers in ballet slippers trailed her. Jefferson hugged her, then followed her into the girls’ changing room.

“Do you know where Ginger went?” she asked.

Aisha had an apologetic expression as she shook her head. “Ginger called me and Ronna”—the other full-time teacher —“into the office and introduced us to Milly Falls.”

“Ginger’s old teacher from college?”

“That’s her. Milly’s on sabbatical. She’s taking over Ginger’s classes for a while.”

“While Ginger—”

“I don’t know, Jef. She didn’t tell you neither?”

“I wouldn’t be asking if she had,” regretting immediately that she sounded irritated at sensitive Aisha.

“Don’t get all odd about it. All’s I know is I saw your bud Mitchell hanging around night and day, like some old manly husband to her. I always thought he was as gay as us. I got to tell you, Jef, I have never seen Miss G. so stone-cold all-business. It’s been like her heart seized up on her and her face froze this last week. Especially those eyes. I have seen warmer eyes on a damn statue.”

It should have come to her the minute she saw Ginger with Mitchell and the suitcases, but it didn’t hit her until Aisha, with her puzzled words, spoke the eulogy for their decades of love. The giant oak of herself fell to the ground, uprooted by the ice storm that had hovered over every lover since the beginning of time.

Was this what Ginger felt every night Jefferson didn’t come home or returned reeking of the scent of calumny? Ginger was beautiful, but what she’d taken for quietness in Ginger had become a savage coldness in recent years. Had Ginger felt this way while staring through their apartment windows at the iron balcony railing, fenced into a relationship full of spikes and bars? Was there a way to survive this devastation?

The city under its dirty crust of snow looked shredded and ravaged. Jefferson, spent in every cell of her body, walked the nearly sixty blocks home, every street bringing back a pulverizing memory of Ginger, every side street the one into which Ginger had disappeared. She felt as if she was crawling all the way.

## **The Blessing**

**Marie LaPre-Grabon**

Early morning...  
beyond first light  
I choose a chair  
barely lit  
by the rising sun  
the only one  
touched  
by weak shafts  
of sun  
rays  
filtered by  
red grasses  
in the blue vase  
on the blond table  
the sun  
like a halo  
rays  
streaming  
reaching  
thru/around/above  
the mass of stems  
and seeds  
and pods  
blessing this spot  
and  
this moment.



## **Semipalmated Plovers at Block Island**

**Marie LaPre-Grabon**

Surreptitiously I joined them  
at the water's edge  
they didn't notice  
as I waded in...watching  
long toothpick beaks  
poke into dripping, glistening sand  
icy water licking orange stilted legs  
like wind-up toys they ran ahead of  
gleaming lips of tiny breaking waves  
and quickly followed  
the rhythm of the surf  
the amorphous curve of whispering foam  
gleaning, probing  
as they searched for miniscule worms  
invisible to me  
and the sparkling ocean lay down  
a panoramic blanket  
that shouted  
of a million glittering diamonds.

## **Soul's Presence**

*for Judy O'Neil*

**Fran Winant**

almost a victory, a smile, an imagined future,  
then breath without awakening,  
soul's presence,  
smile's radiance echoing eternally,  
seasons turning and the spin of galaxies.  
for a moment we feel ourselves freer than we are.  
in your room everyone presses against the windowglass  
watching hawks chase pigeons across a vast sky.  
in the background, your breath continues rippling  
like the endless waves of the gray river below  
while in the park beside the river  
a woman and dog play frisbee,  
their energy a wealth they hardly know they own,  
the riches of life itself tossed in the winter air.  
sunset turns the buildings across the way  
into a kind of Stonehenge, red, orange, gold glows  
slipping behind monumental forms,  
symphonic rays flowing into infinity.  
its a beautiful room in which to die.  
caught in timelessness, friends and relatives sit talking,  
holding your hand, arm, ankle,  
touching the warmth of your shoulder,  
measuring the relentless journey of your breath  
through a sudden swirling storm  
of white crystals sweeping across the water  
to the place the soul calls home.  
late at night an old friend arrives  
to take your hand in the darkness.

into invisible reality, wrapped in hidden dimensions,  
you ascend to the place of ordinary heroes,  
makers of impossible decisions.  
those who can see

say that last visionary smile is a sign  
of blending into rainbows, empowered by love,  
then soaring on solar winds,  
so much left undone and yet so much to make your own,  
eyes open now, new senses revealing  
bridges and paths through transcendent landscapes.  
winter left behind, you stand by a lake in Summerland  
and on its surface view the universe  
mirrored unto the first and last star.  
within this clear lens are also replayed  
marches where you called for justice  
and you smile again knowing yourself  
a brave member of an army for peace.  
you sought out those who knew the way,  
stepping forward with them when others hung back.  
you created a world for people of the future,  
expanding both their truth and fantasy,  
remaking the possible for everyone.  
you gave a gift, gave yourself.  
now, wrapped in hidden dimensions,  
you ascend to the place of ordinary heroes.

the dead reappear with warm smiles and curious eyes  
painted over living faces half glimpsed on the street,  
memories with their own lives,  
floating into the almost real,  
as I see you in someone else's glance and then look closer.  
have you, like stars and planets, had a return,  
cycled back through those you knew  
to be again focused within these shadows, this light,  
falling translucent onto the world?

## **Black Silk**

### **Ruth Mountaingrove**

Your black silk shirt  
through which my fingers  
caress your breast  
revel in softness  
of silk, discover  
round and firm  
circumference and radius  
navigate, explore  
the rising center.  
Your words add  
to this journal  
of being lost on a continent  
never touched before.  
We send back  
plant listings  
sittings of forests, rivers,  
reports of fevers,  
disorientations.

Your black silk shirt  
and my explorer's fingers  
scouting the silk of skin;  
in me rises a fire  
to match your flaming  
wanting. My fingers  
and my lips  
tease you into ecstasy.  
This continent we explore  
together. Our nerve ends  
send messages to minds  
we have forgotten.

Waking  
to touch, to longing,  
to worlds, unmapped  
until now;

to mind's  
remembering silk.

## **How To Wash A Silk Shirt**

### **Ruth Mountaingrove**

First you put it on  
over your naked body.  
Then you step into the shower.  
Adjust the temperature of the water.  
Take soap, rub the silk  
on the arms covering your arms,  
on the breasts covering your breasts,  
on the back covering your back.  
This last is tricky. For this  
you invite another into the shower.  
Let her wash the back that covers  
your back.

Rinse well, the shirt  
still on your body. Turn off the shower.  
Hang the shirt on a hanger  
dripping wet over the shower head  
to dry.

Kiss the woman  
naked next to you. Soap her  
just as you did your silk shirt.  
Her arms. her breasts, her back.  
Turn on the shower, rinse well,  
turning her in your arms.

## Going Dutch

### Clare Summerskill

I have noticed that as Lesbians, we don't often smile at each other in recognition of our similar Sapphic persuasions; in fact we tend to either look down or away from a couple of obvious dykes who probably look far more like we do than we would perhaps care to admit. On the early morning flight to Lesbos there were, it must be said quite a few of us in the terminal that looked a little alike. Thankfully though, no one I knew or had slept with, (apart from my girlfriend of course) which always helps me relax a little at the beginning of a holiday. When we finally boarded the plane I struggled along the aisle with my bulky backpack banging into a few tutting passengers who had already found their seats. It wasn't really necessary to double-check that you were on a flight to the island of Lesbos because at the point when the air hostesses asked over the tannoy for anyone to put their hands up if they required a vegetarian meal, more than two thirds of the passengers responded! By the time the almost inedible food arrived I had started to unwind just a weeny bit but I knew I was still extremely tired and tense. The four a.m. start had completely done me in but I told myself that once we reached our destination the first thing I would do was go skinny dipping in the wonderfully warm Mediterranean water before indulging in a supper of local fresh fish and Greek salad.

The way to reach the small village where we would be staying was to ask two other dykes you had never met before if they wanted to share the exorbitant fare of a taxi and then the four of you and a Greek taxi driver would all take your lives in your hands for a couple of hours driving through mountainous terrain over unmade roads and round hair-pin bends. This dangerous journey would finally bring you to the more secluded part of the island, avoided by most of the straight tourists, that was the lesbian resort of Eressos. It certainly took quite an effort to find but no one ever said it was ever going to be easy to be blessed with a different sexuality from most of the population!

It had been my girlfriend's idea, that I celebrate my big Four O whilst on holiday and then I had the idea of asking some

of our friends along too. We wouldn't need to all go around together, just a few disparate dykey singles and couples who all knew us staying in the same resort over the same period and maybe having a bit of a knees-up on the special day. I didn't know 'til we arrived at Myteline, and a warm blast of air hit me as I came off the plane just how much I needed a holiday and I didn't know until the first day that Jenny and I laid our towels down on the beach just how much we needed to spend this time together.

It was only six months ago that we had been on the brink of splitting up. Jenny had told me that she had been seeing somebody and I remembered all those evenings when she had called me and said that she was working late. And I'd fallen for it, every time, because I'm like that. Or I was like that. I was completely gullible about everything. Jenny could have told me Martina was on the same train home as her and I would have believed her and asked if Pam Shriver was anywhere to be seen in the nearby vicinity? But not any more. I'm harder now. Not so trusting. We stayed together, but it's not the same.

I still love Jenny. Hated her for quite a while, but never stopped loving her too, if that makes any sense. It had all come out one night when she said that we needed to talk. I knew then, by that very phrase "We need to talk". Because those words never just mean, "We need to talk" do they? Because we talk all the time. Every day, as a couple, every evening we talk and we don't say that "we need to talk" before we discuss the shopping we have to get in or our plans for the weekend. No, in my experience, "We need to talk" only means one thing. That your girlfriend is thinking of dumping you.

So apparently we "needed to talk" and we did so. She had told me all about this woman she worked with called Annabelle. That was her name. Still is, I assume. Jenny said it had all just been a bit of fun at first but that she had started falling for Annabelle and Annabelle had a girlfriend as well but wanted to keep her and go back to her and didn't want to become a couple with Jenny. You might have noticed from the little I've told you that I didn't even figure in these calculations. I was just the one that Jenny went back to after it all went pear-shaped. You might also have thought that Jenny didn't actually need to tell me anything at all and that she was only mentioning



it out of decency and respect for me and for our relationship, but you would have thought wrong. She told me because I had found her out. One weekend there had been a phone call at our flat. I'd picked up the phone in one room at exactly the same time as Jenny and before I could say anything a voice went "Jenny, is that you?" And Jenny said, "Yes darling, but if you hear a click then Clare's picked up the phone so be quick." And then for the first time ever I perversely enjoyed hearing another woman use that well-worn phrase, "We need to talk."

I think the thing that probably puts a lot of couples off splitting up is not so much the thought that they couldn't live without each other but is more to do with the worry of what a drag it would be to start looking for another girlfriend. At a certain point, when things are going wrong with your lover you sometimes think, "I really haven't got the energy to start again with someone new. Because it would involve going out at night to try and meet someone, and then I'd have to video Coronation Street which is really good at the moment, and then I'd have to go on public transport if I met someone for a drink. And I'd have to drink, 'cos I couldn't do all that sort of dating thing cold stone sober. And then they'd only know me when I was drunk and loud and fun and they wouldn't like the other side of me when things settled down, the side that likes watching taped videos of Coronation Street when I've been out for the evening. I just couldn't face all that. It's so much easier to just stay with my girlfriend. Even if she has cheated on me, even if she has lied time after time to me, even if I can't trust her further than I could throw her...but dating a complete stranger? That sounds so horrendous. No, I might as well just stay with Jenny."

So we stayed together. We "worked it through" as best we could. I said I would never trust her again. She said she was so sorry she'd hurt me. I said I didn't want to leave her because no one else laughed at my jokes. She said that's 'cos they weren't very funny but she loved me so much she wanted me to think they were. I took a while to work out whether that was a nice thing of her to say or not, by which time she'd made me a lovely cup of tea and produced a large chocolate bar and then we snuggled up together on the sofa and she stroked my hair and told me how stupid she'd been, would I ever forgive her and

what time was Ugly Betty on? And it all felt so familiar and so warm and safe that I couldn't bear to give any of it up.

And on that first day on the beach there were these women with a makeshift home-made kite, hand-knitted by the look of it in true back-to-basic lesbian fashion! And we were watching them throw it up into the air again and again until it finally caught the breeze and took flight. And then the wind picked up and kept it flying confidently and in my mind's eye I suddenly imagined what would happen if the woman holding it had let go. The string would have slipped through her fingers in a split second and the kite would have just flown right away, up into the sky, way over the hills, into the distance and they would never have found it again. And with that picture in my mind I was so glad that Jenny and I hadn't let each other go. That we had held on. And whether it Jenny or me that had done the holding, I'm still not sure, but at least we were together.

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Karen and Stella were the first of our friends to join us in Eressos. They had told us approximately when they would be coming and we greeted them with welcoming hugs in the village square. We were then introduced to a couple of women who they had not known at all before they had been forced to share a taxi with, but owing to their proximity in the car and the vicious bends which had repeatedly forced them to lean on each other in a very un-English manner, they now regarded these two other dykes as close and treasured travelling companions. After a cool drink in one of the bars and a quick discussion with someone from the travel agency we helped our friends with their luggage and all walked together to the designated women's B & B where they would be staying.

Karen was a really old friend of Jenny's from her hockey days and I had always got on well with her and Stella was a lot of fun too so we made a good foursome. The day after that two other couples arrived. Susan and Debs lived quite near us in London so we saw them often. We had all met each other at a friends' dinner party and got on although none of us had much time any more for the original friend whose party it was because she was now dating a merchant banker and she kept telling us about how much money her girlfriend made but that she's still in

the closet because, “Well you guys just wouldn’t understand but it’s a completely different world in the City.”

Monica and Danielle also turned up at the resort.

Monica is my best friend of twenty years, who is of course an ex-girlfriend but so far back in the past-of-an-ex that no girlfriend of either of ours would ever think of feeling threatened and in fact the very thought of us ever having been together now makes us both cringe and simultaneously go “Ugh, no...yuk!!!” But it was nice to have her there with me for this special celebration. Things might have been up and down with Jenny but Monica had always been a rock to me and over the years had taken my side on absolutely everything, even over things where I can see now I might quite clearly have been in the wrong! I loved her to bits, and smiled to myself at the thought that she had come along on this trip even though she had said that she couldn’t think of anything more frightening than joining “a group of drunken, sun-burnt hormonally-challenged lesbians from all over the world in very close proximity to each other.”

So that was all the couples, and then there was Elena.

Elena was an amazingly beautiful and talented singer who always declared that she was totally free and single and yet if you scratched a little beneath the surface you would always find that she was in truth seeing someone. Not the same someone as you had found out about before, a different someone. But it was always a mysterious someone and usually a very attractive someone of foreign descent. Elena arrived in Eressos on her own and I was delighted to see her but I knew that she wouldn’t be able to remain alone for the entire duration of the holiday and I looked forward to learning about her romantic developments and the inevitable fact that she would try and hide them from me, tell me that nothing was happening and that she and the new someone that she was clearly shagging were just good friends!

Over the first few days the holiday seemed to be going really well. We all agreed that we didn’t always want to do everything as a group and that we were quite happy eating or drinking at separate bars and restaurants and meeting up if and when we felt like it. In spite of this agreement we found ourselves generally joining the others every day on the beach as we all sat facing the sea and checking out the lovely and various shapes of

all the other women around us. We were on the nudist part of the beach and there were all these lovely lady lesbian bodies playing volleyball, applying sun-tan lotion, running in and out of the sea. I know that politically speaking I should not admit to sexually objectify woman but I have to tell you that lying there and watching them all, my last remaining credentials from the 1980s finally disappeared for good.

We also bumped into a few people we already knew from England. Some we hid from behind sand dunes for long periods of time to avoid being spotted but others we were thrilled to see and asked them along to my big party which we had decided was to be held at the weekend. There was a lovely woman called June who was a doctor I knew and a lawyer friend of hers that we hadn't met before called Lucy. They came up to us as we were sitting on the beach and we chatted for quite a while which was great except for the very slight distraction of them being stark naked. I remember hoping that I would never require their professional services in the future because if I did I just wouldn't be able to get that image out of my head while I was working with them, especially that of Doctor June who as I recall had a little string hanging out from between her legs.

One evening there were a few of us eating at a restaurant and a couple from Holland who Karen and Stella had made friends with the night before. They were called Nette and Angelica and they were both therapists. Angelica was dark and intense looking and clearly quite brainy and Nette was blond and large and seemed the more fun of the two but they both had a wicked sense of humour and laughed at the “alternative healing lesbian world of witchery and wonderment” that they happily inhabited. This reinforced my opinion that the only thing I really hate about the Dutch is their ability to speak English better than we do! But it didn't take long before we were looking out for them on the beach and either they came and sat by us or we went over to join them for another hard day of doing a marvellous impression of a group of beached whales stranded upon Sapphic sands.

Everyone seemed happy and relaxed except for Susan and Debs who were quite clearly going through a “tricky” stage. They could usually be found hanging out with the largest groups of women they could find, presumably to avoid being with each

other or else they would go off together for long walks to the very end of the beach which took you as far as Sappho's Rock. This was not an island discothèque as you might have feared from its name but instead a dramatic and beautiful cliff leading down to the sea which at the right angle, against the horizon looked a little bit like the outline of a woman's body. But when Susan and Debs stormed off in that direction for yet another heated discussion you could see them in animated conversation with arms flailing and then one of them would inevitably walk back on her own quite clearly having had a row of some kind. But they knew better than to "offload" to us about how difficult and unreasonable the other was being even though it was clear that they were both desperate to do so. So we never found out if all the tension was all about one particular disagreement or whether it was just a couple who had been with each other too long and who had slowly but surely grown apart.

In the evenings they both drank far too much and they would then not be seen on the beach 'til way after lunchtime the next day on account of their frightful hangovers. I cared for both of them, well to be honest I slightly fancied Debs, but it was literally a fancy. I wouldn't have wanted anything to come of it, but sometimes it's fun to have a little "twinkle" going on with a friend, isn't it? Or is that just me? But honestly, hand on heart I wanted them to settle their differences and make up and be close again, and that way I could feel safer and happier about once again fancying Debs! But still the friction between them continued and Jenny and I didn't know what to do to help and a really selfish part of us that remained unspoken but I know still existed didn't want their fighting in any way to mar this very special and badly needed holiday.

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I can't flirt. I wish I could, but I've never been able to. If I really like someone I find myself just taking the piss out of them a lot. That can of course be slightly misleading I'm sure but it's my immature and misguided way of trying to amuse and impress and I can recall more than one conversation with a girlfriend who has said to me, "I was so sure you didn't like me when we met. I couldn't understand why you were being so mean!" But I'm also no good at being able to tell if and when anyone is

flirting with me, which is partly how I got into trouble on Eressos that particular summer.

We were all down on the beach one day, a crowd of us having a good time but when you're on holiday with friends in the sun you still manage to find things in life to complain about so I was mentioning my bad back and saying that I'd had a rough night with it. The two Dutch lesbians immediately offered me a massage, yet another of their "alternative healing" skills. They briefly discussed who might be the one to perform the deed and decided upon Nette who said that she would come round to our studio early evening if I wanted, post shower and pre-dinner to give me a proper seeing to (my words, not hers!). This was one of the things I loved about this resort, because all around you would see women giving each other a haircut on the beach, or offering a little reiki to their mates. It was a bit like bartering but even better because I didn't have to give anything back to anyone in return but I thought it was great and happily agreed to have Nette come round!

Jenny and I had rented a studio apartment in the village. It was owned and run by a lovely Greek woman called Joanna who somehow managed to appear calm and friendly at all times and amazingly un-phased by the constantly changing variety of international lesbians she must have seen coming in and out of her flats night and day. Dykes who were still at that totally "loved-up" stage, when they can't resist groping and kissing each other every second, dykes who had just had a terrible domestic but are totally oblivious to the icy aura that they emanate to all around but also dykes who had been with each other for so many years that they can pack a joint bag for the beach without so much as a single word passing their lips, a level of lesbian achievement I must say, for which I have nothing but total admiration!

I was sitting peacefully on the balcony of our studio, sipping a cool lemonade and sheltering from the strength of the afternoon sun when Nette called up to me from the road. Jenny was still on the beach. She usually stayed there 'til the sun went down, a real sun-worshipper, lapping up every single little ray. She'd always said that one day she felt she was destined to live between the mountains and the sea. Neither country or water mass were ever specified, and nor was the clearly insignificant

detail of whether or not I might be sharing that particular stage of her life with her.

I opened the door to Nette and she smiled warmly and asked where I would feel comfortable lying down, on the bed or the sofa? I thought that the sofa would be best because it was narrower and would enable her to get round me from all angles if necessary. She told me to take everything off but my knickers and then as I lay down with a towel around me she gently lowered it down my back and began to work her fabulous finger magic! She had even brought some smelly oils to rub over me.

A happy little thing was I during that hour of personalised pampering and by the time she finally announced that she was finished I was lying on my back with my eyes closed and my mind drifting towards the realms of sleep.

“Thank you, that was so wonderful.” I grunted.

She was standing behind me and said, “My pleasure” and then she leant over and very very gently kissed me on the forehead. Before I knew it she had gone out through the door and I was left there, still with the towel over me, wondering if perhaps I had made the last bit up? No, I remembered it clear as a bell, she had leant over and kissed me. But what did it mean? That she liked me? That she fancied me? Or was it a special thing that Dutch women do at the end of a massage to show that it’s finished?

“Would I tell Jenny” that was the big question? “Well, of course not!” was my instant response. But if I thought that then surely that meant that there was something in it? So if it wasn’t to be made public then it was to be a secret. Just between us Nette and me. Oh my God! Something significant had just happened and I didn’t quite know what it meant but I knew it felt like fun. It seemed precious and exciting but also kind of sweet and gentle and innocent at the same time, and to be honest this is what I’d missed for so many years with Jenny. Feeling special, feeling cared for, feeling sought out from all the others in some small way. I realised that these were the things I felt I was missing. Not the sex, funnily enough I could live without that, but the attention. Was that wrong? Was that needy? I didn’t know.

All I knew is that I wanted to stay there lying on the sofa with that warm feeling running around my stomach and my

brain for a very long time and not get up and not take a shower and certainly not go and find Jenny on the beach and tell her how much better my back was feeling and casually mention that the Dutch were a truly marvellous if sometimes underestimated race of people!

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That evening as a crowd of us sipped cocktails at the Sappho Hotel I found myself waiting for a certain someone's arrival. I looked around expectantly as anyone either walked by the tables onto another destination or sat down near us. Monica and Danielle were already at our table. Monica had an extremely bad case of sunburn and had been indoors all day, cursing the Mediterranean climate and wishing that she was holidaying somewhere sensible, like Greenland. Karen and Stella then pitched up. They told us all about the pony trek that they had been on that afternoon, saying that the animals were in such a sorry state that they had every intention of reporting the owners to the Greek equivalent of the NSPCA, if in fact one existed and that their own backsides were so sore from a two hour ride that they didn't think they would ever be able to walk properly again. Elena then arrived with a gorgeous looking woman who she introduced to us as her "friend Natalia" who was young, tall and glamorous and could easily have been a model. Quite what she was doing hanging out with a load of middle age English dykes bemoaning the shortfalls of a hot climate and a beautiful landscape was totally beyond me.

Some more people joined us and I looked up again in hope that one of them might be my 'certain someone' but instead it was just Debs. She caught my eager glance in her direction and I think mistook it for an enthusiastic welcome. She pulled a chair up close to me and told me that Susan was still having a nap in her room and would join us all for a meal later. Debs then started chatting away to me about how she felt so spiritually at home in Eressos. I must admit I was a little surprised because all I'd really seen of her so far on the holiday was either looking sour-faced or angry or drinking to avoid her sorrows. But I was pleased that she seemed to at least be getting something out of the holiday.



“I can’t really explain it all....” She began, but I had a feeling that she would try nonetheless. I was right and she continued.

“There’s just something about this place, things are coming up for me that I’ve never felt before and well, I just want to thank you so much for bringing me here”.

It made it sound a bit too much as if I had personally whisked her away, just the two of us for a romantic honeymoon so I very quickly said:

“Yes, Jenny had some great ideas sometimes!”

But she didn’t seem to take the hint and went on:

“It just awakens all your senses, doesn’t it? The beauty, the peace, the hills, the sea. It makes me realise what I really want from life.”

And at that point she started staring meaningfully into my eyes. I didn’t like to ask her what on earth she was talking about just in case I might regret hearing the response. But that was a silly thought. I’m sure she was just feeling a little lonely and sad that things weren’t going well with Susan. She ordered a drink, gulped it down, ordered another and started gazing in an appreciative way at Elena’s new girlfriend. That made me feel slightly safer, if a tiny bit irrationally jealous at the same time but I quickly moved on from that and started once again looking around, beyond the immediate company to see if a “certain someone” was going to put in an appearance.

I’m sure Jenny didn’t notice that I was in the least distracted. She hadn’t even asked me how the massage had gone and as I watched her and Karen laughing their heads off about something I realised that the days of my seeing Jenny through the eyes of a lover were unfortunately long gone and that although I still cared for her so deeply, it was with less of a lustful longing and more a fondness of familiarity.

I was on my second Pina Colada before I noticed that at some point Nette must have joined the group and sat down with Angelica. I felt my tummy flip over inside me, a sensation I remember experiencing on a regular basis when I was fifteen and Miss Boxhall would come into the classroom every morning to take registration. Nette caught my glance and her beaming smile combined with twinkling eyes convinced me that I hadn’t been exaggerating the significance of what had happened that

afternoon. I think I went bright red, which I realise is not an incredibly mature thing to do but I just couldn't help it and hoped that if anyone had seen they would put it down to my drinking. I'm not teetotal by any means but from years of holiday drinking experience I have trained myself never to have more than two cocktails a night. At forty I had learnt that Pina Colodas might taste exactly like milkshakes but the way I behave after having drunk a few always remind me that they are quite definitely not one and the same!

Jenny suggested to everyone that we try a certain seafood restaurant that was known for serving delicious sardines. I thought that sounded a little improbable as a concept, only ever having encountered a sardine before in a tin with brine but I was prepared to be proved wrong. All the restaurants in the village looked out onto the sea and were to be found along the main stretch of the village. The one that Jenny had her eye on was right at the other end from the bar where we were drinking but a few of the other women with us eagerly agreed to come along. Monica and Danielle jumped up as well as Elena and her "just good friend, Natalia" and Debs said that she would come too and leave Susan to find us all of her own accord if and when she regained consciousness. I noticed that Debs had a spring in her step as she paid her bill and then she laced her arm through mine as we began to walk towards the restaurant. I was turning my head back to our table to see if Nette was coming as well but she remained there with Angelica and a couple from Paris that they'd introduced us to the day before and I felt a little pang of disappointment that they weren't going to be joining us.

I walked through the village with Debs chattering in my ear about how, like Phil Collins, she too could feel something "coming in the air tonight." I had always found Deb's flirty behaviour a lot of fun but for the first time it seemed to me rather annoying and slightly childish. I tried to work out what on earth was happening to me. I knew that it felt exciting, this link that Nette and I had somehow forged and I knew that nothing would come of it, because we were both with long-term partners and that that was probably the best way it could be. But of course a little unattainable longing suits a lesbian just perfectly, doesn't it? Or at least that had always been my experience. But could you keep it at that? Well of course you could if it really was

someone unattainable like Ellen Degeneres. But if it was a friend who you liked.....on holiday....from another country....who you wouldn't see again.....well, where would be the harm? I really didn't know the answer and anyway by that time in my thought process we were all sitting down and it was my turn to order.

"Just enjoy it," I told myself. "Enjoy it all. This is all part of the fun, isn't it? A load of women in the middle of the Mediterranean. Of course a few sexy sparks are going to be flying around here and there, it's all part of the experience. Nothing to get stressed about. And at the end of the day, albeit a day full of fantastical imagination running a little wild, you've still got a lovely girlfriend to go back to with so either way you're laughing!"

Sometimes I so wish that I could learn to listen to the sensible part of me that gives the silly side of me such good advice!

After that the evening passed uneventfully. Susan managed to track down Debs by the time we were all onto ice creams and coffees. They sat together at the end of the table talking quietly and intensely with each other for a little while and then Debs moved places and without asking them plonked herself between Monica and Danielle. I walked back to the studio with Jenny, hand in hand. Before long she was doing that thing that far too many tourists seem to do when they become enraptured by the local charms of their holiday resort and sure enough out popped the inevitable question. No, not the one about whether we should get married, not that one, but the: "I wonder how much a place here would cost to buy?" one.

"You really like it then?" I asked.

"It's all come together hasn't it, with our friends and everything. I wasn't sure how that would work but everyone's getting on, aren't they?"

"Yes, it's brilliant." I said.

"And whose clever and wonderful idea was all this then, I forget now...?" Said Jenny. "Oh yes, it was mine, wasn't it?"

As well as being significantly more self-confident by nature, Jenny is also a far more sociable creature than I am, which I know was part of the appeal all those years ago when we first met. I like people but I'm better at one-to-ones and talking about things I find really interesting or important rather than

general chit-chat. Jenny loves a crowd, a gang, a group, she loves to belong, whereas I think deep down I'm probably more of a loner. But she was really enjoying the "village" life of Eressos, bumping into familiar faces left, right and centre. But "village" life can of course be a double-edged sword (if one were ever tempted to look at it in terms of a weapon of war) The up side being of course that everyone knows everyone and the down side being that everyone knows everyone! And that was to prove my undoing.

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The next day on the beach the weather was slightly cloudy and a little chilly but we all sat there any way in true "British at the seaside on a Bank Holiday" style. Jenny and I were devouring the books we'd brought at a rate of knots and swapping the good ones with each other after we'd read them. At around lunchtime we wandered off to a café hut that sold Greek salads and drinks and we saw Nette and Angelica were there already so we went over to join them. Angelica asked me how the massage had gone? I said it was great and that I'd slept a lot better that night. Jenny then asked Angelica if she had seen the little turtles in the pond by the beach, saying that they often came out more when it was overcast or raining and before we knew it they'd both gone off to look at them. There was a short silence after which Nette said:

"So you really feel the massage helped?"

"Yes, yes, it was great. Thank you. Great. Thanks. Cheers. Yeah."

I'm not sure if completely losing the power of speech might possibly have given away the fact that I was a teeny bit nervous but although I mentioned previously that I have no idea when people are flirting with me I began to pick up certain signals from Nette that made me think that was exactly what she was doing. She moved her chair a little closer to me and as she spoke she lowered her voice very slightly and stared right into my eyes.

"Do you think you might enjoy another massage at some point?" She asked.

But I wondered whether she had used the word "Enjoy" deliberately, making it sound like a mistake any non-English speaker would use, and yet I happened to know that her English

was probably better than mine, so why hadn't she just said, "Do you think you might "like" another massage"? OK, I was probably reading far too much into it all, and after my feeble attempt at sentence deconstruction I heard myself clumsily muttering something along the lines of, "Erm, yes, please, if you're not too busy, if you want to, that is, if Angelica doesn't mind at all...."

There now, I'd said it, if not actually spelt it out. I had admitted to her that I knew it was all looking a little bit suspicious, if anyone with a suspicious mind might be doing any looking. Nette however, ignored the direction of my inquiry and with a beaming and, it must be mentioned rather cute smile, said that she would be happy to pop over to my studio again later that afternoon.

Intense excitement immediately clashed in my mind with several worrying thoughts. "Would Jenny think it was dodgy if I told her I was having another massage? Would Angelica mind at all? Would either Jenny or Angelica have the slightest suspicion that anything other than a massage was going on? And far more importantly what in fact was it that was actually going on anyway?" In my imagination I was already way past the massage. We had now kissed passionately and had wild and totally fulfilling sex and I had moved to Rotterdam to start a new life with Nette and was pondering the question of whether a Dutch lesbian audience would speak English well enough to understand my stand-up material.

But in reality, at this point Nette had only asked if I wanted another massage, albeit with a poignant glare that had pinned me into my chair and left me short of breath and unable to move. And then, as if in response to all my unspoken confusion Nette said, "I am very attracted to you. You do know that don't you?" To which I replied with complete confidence and impressive eloquence:

"Um, yes, well, you know, me you too. I mean not attracted to myself, that would be weird, but yes, to what you were saying."

And she was still doing that eye-contact thing where they don't blink or twitch or sneeze or anything but just stare deep deep into your soul and then I looked away from her gaze to see Angelica and Jenny bounding up to the table to join us.

They started burbling on about the turtles being the sweetest little things you'd ever seen and Jenny was saying how they would do so much better in this sort of weather with a few umbrellas between them and then she was asking if it was in fact possible for a turtle to hold an umbrella with one foot or leg, or arm or whatever they had and not sink while they were doing so, in which case the umbrella selling idea might not be such a commercial opportunity in the turtle world after all!

And as the two of them were chatting away I felt that they could have been in a different time zone from me. I noticed that Nette was now joining in their jokes and it suddenly occurred to me that perhaps she had some previous experience of this sort of thing. The laughter, the instant change of mood seemed to come so easily to her. Was she just playing some sort of game? Because it wasn't a game to me and if it was I certainly had no idea of any of the rules or even the language in which it was played.

Yes, I'd maybe sort of fancied a couple of women in the many years that I'd been with Jenny, Debs being one of them as I mentioned, but it had all seemed like a little bit of fun, something every dyke in a long term relationship should be allowed to do once in a while, just to check that everything was still in working order! A bit like a MOT, I suppose! But I had never felt this way before, the way I felt when I was around Nette. And to be honest it felt far more dangerous than fun, because if it ever got out of hand it could seriously threaten my own relationship. But before I jumped ahead to that fear, the immediate million dollar question was, "Did Nette feel the same way?"

As I watched her still chuckling away with the other two I really feared that I might have blown the whole thing out of proportion. But then again she was the one who had said all that stuff about being attracted to me and I hadn't made that up, had I?

Someone settled the bill and in a daze I followed the others to our beach spots. Nette fleetingly turned her head round, without the others noticing and she winked at me. And with that one little crafty, sexy wink I realised that I was hooked on her line and pathetic as it may sound I knew I could do nothing else but wait until she decided to reel me in.

As it turned out the second massage session never happened because Jenny told me that she had made an appointment to see the women who ran the Sappho Hotel to discuss details about my birthday meal there. Fortunately Jenny took all the strain when it came to discussing the menu, drinks, music and seating arrangements and I just agreed and said that it all sounded wonderful, which was true. But my mind was elsewhere and I realised that I was quickly learning to do something that I don't think I had ever done before with Jenny, I was learning to hide and cover up my innermost thoughts from her and hoping that a smile and a nod in the right place would suffice for communication and arouse no suspicion. I have of course over the years been told that most people have lots of things going around their heads that they don't always let everyone else know about, but not me, and it was only at this crucial point in my life that for the first time I realised that there is another option, that of not speaking aloud every single thought that you're thinking! Over the course of our relationship Jenny had got used to my babbling on about what I thought of this or that, him or her, what I was going to do today and tomorrow and how my childhood injuries affected my current behaviour, outlook and personality. And in her wittier moments, as I chatted away, she would do a little mime pretending to wipe some blood from her ear, which meant that my incessant ramblings were making her ears bleed. Oh, how we laughed! But now I was thinking about something, all right, someone, almost non-stop for most of the day (and part of the night) and not saying one single thing out loud about my thoughts and feelings on the matter. And what was even more surprising than me learning to do this was the fact that Jenny hadn't seemed to notice anything. For someone who had known me for so long it was sort of strange that she appeared to have no awareness of this whatsoever.

That evening we joined Monica and Danielle for a meal. I couldn't see Nette or Angelica anywhere, not at the restaurant nor at any of the bars and my over-active imagination started picturing them having had an argument about me and possibly splitting up and flying back to Holland. But the next morning they were there on the beach again, in their usual spot, all smiles, waving us over to join them. As cocktail hour approached we

packed up our things, showered and changed and all met up again at a bar to watch the sun setting magnificently on the horizon, like an aged actress making a glorious final curtain call. Again the Dutch contingency were not to be seen but Debs had perched herself next to me and as the final edge of the orange ball sunk away to obscurity behind the horizon she put her hand on my arm and quietly said, “I need to talk to you.”

“Oh, OK.” I said, trying to replicate her serious tone. “Go on then.”

“Not here.” She said and looked quickly around her as if she was in a scene from a film about the French Resistance. “Come for a walk with me.”

“Erm, all right.” I mumbled “But won’t that look a bit odd?”

“I really need to speak to you.”

“OK, OK, I’m coming.”

And with that I got up and told Jenny that Debs wanted to show me something in a shop that she’d had her eye on. Jenny barely registered my leaving but as we walked away I swear could feel Susan’s eyes boring into the back of me. We set off in the direction of the shops but then Debs suddenly whisked me down a back street which came out onto a little track that led out of the village. When the sun sets in the Mediterranean it very quickly becomes dark and I could tell that without the village lights we would very soon be walking along in total black. I pointed this fact out to Debs but she just replied, “It doesn’t matter. I just need to be alone with you.” So I decided to stop all this rambling, literal and metaphorical and I said:

“Right then, here we are Debs, all alone. Now what is it?”

Debs then took my hand and pulled me down another smaller path, then she drew a somewhat dramatic breath, paused meaningfully, sighed tragically and said, “You see the moon?” We both looked up, yes it was still there in the sky, hadn’t gone anywhere. “Yes.” I replied, assuming this to be the correct response.

“And the stars...” Debs continued. “You see all the stars?”



“Yes.” I said again, wondering if these were trick questions in any way because so far they seemed rather on the easy side.

Debs went on, “I’m just finding that on this island I’m connecting to a sort of spirituality which is making me turn into a different person, and I know that I have you to thank for becoming that person and for bringing me here.”

“Well it was just a birthday party with knobs on really, nothing too mystical about that!” I was trying to lighten the tone but still had certain fears about where this conversation might be going.

“But it means that I’ve come here....”

“Yes,” I said, “You and Susan ...”

“And now I’m here with you.”

“Yes,” I battled on, “You and Susan and me...and Jenny “ I added for good measure. But still she persisted. “I’m trying to tell you something, but I don’t know if you’re hearing me?”

At this point what I really wanted to do was make a kind of radio noise sound effect and go “Ccch, I’m hearing you loud and clear, ccch!” but somehow I managed to restrain myself and actually said, “I am. You’re saying that you like being here, with the moon and the stars and the spiritual feelings and...”

“And you.” She added. “I think I’m in love with you.”

Now, I am rarely accused of being a woman lost for words, but I hadn’t the foggiest idea of what to say or even do after this revelation. Debs solved the problem for me by kissing me on the lips. In an embarrassingly fumbling way she then tried to prise my mouth open with her tongue. I, also imagining myself in a French Resistance film, firmly refused to let her do so, my jaws clenched together and my lips as tight as a metaphorical baboon’s backside!

The love scene, which I’m sure Debs had imagined was clearly not going to plan. Yes, it’s true that over the time we had known each other I had found her attractive, but I realised in that instant that it was only as a fantasy. I didn’t want this in real life and I just couldn’t go ahead with it, even though she obviously desired it quite stongly and even though the normal rules of behaviour seemed to have been somehow thrown to the wind. But I just couldn’t do this.

I wish I could say that it was courageous willpower and a sterling strength of character that held me back, but it wasn't. It was in large part a sudden lack of any physical interest in Debs and to a lesser, but still significant degree, a worrying fear of what Susan might do to me physically if she were to ever find out. Susan, although clearly in a troubled relationship and somewhat vulnerable in that respect was still, it must be said, quite a large girl who, it must be remembered, used to be in the police force, albeit working on the domestic violence side of things, preventing rather than performing I hasten to add, but still, no sensible woman would knowingly set about to incur her wrath.

And yet I knew even then that it was not just the fear, or even the fact that we might all lose each other's friendships. No more going out to the pictures in a jolly foursome followed by a pizza with anchovies, mozzarella and a heated debate about the film we'd all just seen. So was it Jenny that was preventing me from taking this any further? My loyalty to her and to our relationship? Not wanting to deceive her any more than I already had? Yes, that must surely be the reason I tried to convince myself. But deep down I knew the truth. It was actually because I just didn't want to be here in a field in the dark with this woman coming onto me....I wanted to be in a field in the dark ....with Nette.

Oh dear, this was getting complicated! I heard myself running off a load of excuses to doe-eyed Debs, as many excuses as I could possibly think of. I didn't want to ruin our friendship, which I really treasured. I didn't want to hurt or deceive Jenny. I wanted Debs and Susan to work their problems out and remain a couple because I thought they were so good together and I knew that if I got involved at this point it would be almost impossible for them to do that. But still she pleaded with me:

“Just one kiss, that's all I'm asking. Please, please. I've been wanting you for so long. I thought you felt the same way. I understand you Clare and I know that this was meant to happen, I just feel it, it was fate that brought us here.”

“Olympic Airlines to be precise.” I was thinking to myself but let's not get too literal!

“Debs, it's not going to happen.” I was trying so hard to sound firm but caring. I didn't want to hurt her, I really didn't.

“I appreciate it so much, that you care for me and of course I’m flattered, but it would ruin everything and I just don’t want to lose Jenny.”

“Just one kiss, that’s all I ask?” She pleaded.

“No, honestly ...I really can’t. ”

She turned away but I could see that her face was full of hurt and anger and a part of me wanted to relent. To kiss her better, to make her happy again, happy and sexy and confident, like she’d been ten minutes ago. But I knew that it would be even more cruel to lead her on, give her a little hope when there was none.

“Come on, let’s go back now.” I said, as gently as I possibly could.

“You go.” She replied. “I’m just going to stay here for a while.”

“I’ll wait then.”

“No” She said sharply, “Just let me be alone. I need to get myself together.”

“OK, if you’re sure. Debs, I’m so sorry, I really am.”

And as I walked back to the village I felt dreadful. It might sound corny but I really felt her pain and yet I knew it would have been wrong to have done anything with her.

But another reason I was feeling so bad was because I knew it was yet another thing that I was not going to be telling Jenny about, recalling the event over and over in my mind, wondering if I should have done or said anything different, but keeping it all a secret. By nature wanting to share my thoughts and feelings about it all with my girlfriend, but feeling that I shouldn’t, that it would be unfair and slightly cruel to Debs to tell Jenny all about it. Perhaps I could at least tell Monica about the whole thing, she would definitely understand and I could count on her to be totally discreet. But on the other hand I didn’t want her to laugh too much at Debs making a bit of a fool of herself, because, well let’s be honest here, there but for the grace of God....!!! And I knew if I told Monica what had happened I wouldn’t be able to keep the element of humour out of the telling, so keeping it to myself I guess was the only option. But thinking about Monica made me examine the idea of letting her know instead about what was going on with Nette. I couldn’t predict how she might she take that one? It’s true that she’s

always been on my side in the past but would she think that there was too much at stake to have a good old giggle about the whole thing? Or would her morals maybe stand in the way and for the first time come between our friendship? The very thought was unbearable. But right in the process of mulling through all these possibilities another image started forming itself in my imagination, a scene of what might have happened had it been me and Nette together in that field in the dark, girlfriends safely away back in the village with nothing but a weak and all too quickly dismissible conscience to stand in the way of our desires.

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The following day was Saturday, my actual birthday, and the party meal was going to be held that night. Another scorcher on the beach, Elena said it was so hot and close that she was sure that it must be about to break any day now. I felt just the same way in my head. I spent the entire day doing what I enjoy most, sunbathing until I couldn't bear the heat any longer and then running into the water to cool down and doing that all over and over again. Each time I was in the sea I would be either swimming around or treading water but my gaze was always towards the part of the beach where Nette was sunbathing in the nude. She was fair-skinned by nature but managed to tan effortlessly to a beautiful golden brown and from the comfort of the sea I could look at her for long periods of time without anyone noticing and feast my eyes on that particular vision of delight! After each dip I would go back to my towel next to Jenny and book in hand and eyes well hidden by sunglasses I would then lie on my left side and pretend to read whereas in fact that position was just serving to give me a good view of Nette and yet in no way betray the fact that I was perving on her.

Debs and Susan came down to the beach after lunch and sat the other side of us, on our right as we faced the sea. They put up a couple of parasols and a few minutes later when they were settled down I caught Debs doing exactly what I had been doing to Nette, peering over her book to look at me whilst pretending not to. I realised that the whole situation was beginning to turn into something of an Ealing Comedy! And there was Jenny plopped down in the middle of all this, seemingly oblivious to everything and then Nette and Angelica

stopped by to chat to us and again I was aware that three out of six of us were all to some degree all deceiving our girlfriends.

I felt myself torn between feeling guilty over Jenny, slight irritation at Deb's attentions and palpable excitement at the proximity of Nette's physical presence, and so the day continued until it was time to pack up our things and go back to our studio to get ready for the birthday meal.

Just before we went out to the restaurant Jenny said that she wanted to give me a present and she handed me a box which I unwrapped and then found a jagged rock cluster that I didn't know the name of but the inside of it was a beautiful purple colour. She knows that I love that sort of thing and that in spite of my occasional cynical comments about alternative lesbian lifestyles I have been known to reveal tendencies to what she calls a "dippy hippy" side to my nature.

"Thank you so much," I said, "It's absolutely beautiful".

"There's a bigger present waiting for you at home, but it wouldn't have fitted on the plane!"

"What is it? Tell me!!!"

"Can't tell you, it's a surprise."

"Well then, surprise me by telling me!"

"Well, you know you said you needed a new car..."

"You're kidding me?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Oh, ha ha! Have you really got me something else?"

"Well when we get home I think you'll find that your office has been decorated by some friendly lesbian elves who I employed."

"Oh that's fantastic! I've been meaning to do that room for years..."

"I know."

"And would these elves by any chance go by the names of Angela and Annie?" (Two lesbian decorator friends of ours.)

"When they finish their Christmas duties in the North Pole and appear in human form, that is indeed the names they go by!"

"Oh thank you so much darling!" I kissed her on the cheek "And for organising the party and the trip and everything."

“It’s been fun! I wanted to...you know...try and make up a bit for, well...wanted you to know how important you are to me and....and it’s made me realise just how much I ....I ...need you.”

And I was thinking “Please don’t say ‘need’, please say ‘love’, not ‘need’. Please let me know that I’m more to you than just a very close friend that over the years you’ve grown to need. Please say that ‘love’ word so that I don’t find myself looking elsewhere for attention to compensate. Please say it so I don’t have to wait until a foreigner comes on to me on holiday and makes me feel like a woman once more, makes me feel desired and makes me feel desires that I never thought I’d feel again”. Being good friends with someone is fantastic and important, don’t get me wrong, but there’s no physicality involved is there? A good friend doesn’t notice if you’ve put on weight, or if you’ve dyed your hair or if you’re wearing a new top but a lover will see these things, delight in them even, because she wants you to look good for her to enjoy. A lover will make you feel alive again in your body, not just in your mind. A lover will make your heart beat faster and the blood rush to head in that moment when you receive a text with their name on it and just before you read it. A good friend is such a precious thing and to be valued and cherished dearly but a good friend is not a lover.

I suddenly realised that Jenny was still talking. “And that I want you to know that I will always always....care for you so very deeply.”

She paused...and I waited for more, but none came. She said nothing else about her feelings but simply led me out of the door, into the street and along to the restaurant.

It was a fantastic birthday meal, it really was! I counted that altogether there were eighteen women in our party. All our mates from England. Elena and her “good friend”, Nette and Angelica of course, and a couple of their French pals, the doctor and the lawyer and an Italian couple we’d met the day before who seemed really nice and who we had asked along. Wine flowed, various courses arrived and were cleared away. Several times during the evening I looked down the table at Nette. Not too often and never for too long, wishing that I was sitting next to her, or at least opposite so we could play footsie under the table! At one point, after desert and coffee I glanced over at her

again and that time she held my gaze and just nodded. Two very subtle but nevertheless very discernable nods. God, this was horrible! How could anyone say that falling in love or lust, or whatever the hell it was, was any fun? It was excruciatingly painful but like a runaway train totally impossible to halt once the wheels were in motion and the brakes disengaged.

Back on planet earth, I realised that a sound like a mosquito buzzing in my left ear was in fact Jenny saying something to me about how it was time to get up and make a speech. I didn't really appreciate being wrenched so rudely out of my delicious daydream zone but since I could in no way explain that to her I consented and stood up to thank everyone for being there. I thanked them all for the lovely meal, the beautiful cards and all the presents I had received and of course I thanked Jenny for organising the whole Lesbos Birthday Extravaganza. Everyone clapped and cheered and then Monica made a touching, if a slightly alcohol-fuelled speech about how deeply she had loved me for so many years but how she just couldn't fancy me because I was now too old and she needed to be practical and think about how she really needed someone younger like Danielle who had agreed to look after her in her dotage. After she had finally finished, Jenny then proposed a toast to me which everyone joined in and at that moment I felt slightly overcome with a feeling of something other than lust for possibly the first time that holiday. It was a sense of deep gratitude for all I had around me, this wonderful evening, my girlfriend and all my friends, my health and theirs, but the minute I realised what I did have in my life I immediately started thinking again of what I didn't have. What I still wanted. What, at that particular moment I felt I needed more than anything else in the world. To go over to Nette and snog her so forcefully that she was left gasping for breath! But of course there was no way I could do that. I had to behave and I must not do the one thing I ached for, the one thing that would have totally ruined this evening and possibly my whole life as I knew it. But once the thought and more importantly the image of such an act had entered my mind I just couldn't shift it and it remained implanted there for the rest of the evening.

After the last coffees had been sipped, most of the guests dispersed and the bill settled Jenny asked me if I would mind her

going off to bed. She had never been one for late nights and I said that was fine and as casually as I could mentioned that I'd maybe have another drink at one of the bars and then come up and join her. She kissed me on the cheek and I thanked her again.

“You deserve it.” She said. “You’re my little bear, aren’t you?”

And we kissed again and then she went her way and I went mine. My way went directly to the bar where I knew Nette would be. As I approached it, the swarm of other women drinking there literally became a blur until I spotted Nette at the bar who by contrast, appeared in clear and sharp focus. I assumed that Angelica had gone to bed too since Nette was alone and I knew instinctively that she had been waiting for me.

“Hello Birthday girl.” She said.

“Hello you.”

“Did you have a fun evening?”

“I couldn’t bare not being close to you”.

There, I’d said it! And then of course I started panicking. Was that too forward? Not nearly casual enough? Too heavy and inappropriate perhaps for the actual situation? But I heaved a sigh of relief as she said, “We can be close now. Come.”

She took my hand and led me out of the bar, across the village square and toward the beach. For a fleeting moment I worried if anyone might have seen us but just at that point Nette gave me one of her “Gaze into my eyes and you will never worry about anything again” looks, and after that I could think of nothing else and before I knew it there was just the two of us on the sand. Away from the lights of the village we both sunk down onto our knees and then came the moment for which I’d be longing and aching for so many days. But it seemed like more than days that I’d been waiting for this, it seemed like a lifetime and when we finally kissed it was as if a need deep from the depths of my very being was at long last being met.

Again all the clichés, I know! But I can think of nothing original to describe that kiss, that instant, that sense of inherent pain being met by a long-awaited soothing touch of beauty. Everything about that moment was beautiful, Nette, the beach,



the reflection of the moon shattering the water like glass, her hold, her touch, her mouth.

I couldn't pull myself away from her if my life depended on it and she knew the power that she held over me, and somehow that knowledge made it even stronger. Because I felt like I was being totally possessed, controlled, I had no choice or mind of my own and that was how I wanted it. I couldn't think straight, I couldn't think at all. I just wanted to stay like this for ever... being held, feeling safe, feeling loved and wanted and needed and with no choices to make ever again in my whole life.

The kiss finally ended and we stared into each other's eyes once more. We were holding hands and we concentrated on that for a while, changing our grip, turning each other's fingers over in ours again and again as if that would somehow bring the answer to the question that was in both our minds. "Should we now go further?" Of course we wanted to and we could do it right there, on the beach if necessary or we might go between the huts and then no-one could see us there. All these possibilities were frantically rushing around both our minds but no words needed to be spoken.

Nette led me gently by the hand and I followed her quietly, like a lamb to slaughter. Desire clouding my thoughts, my judgement, my ability to think this through, to look at the implications let alone the risks of what we were about to do. I paused for a moment, still holding her hand but looking back to the sea and then once more into her eyes again. Her hold over me was like a dangerous underwater current, close enough to the shore that no-one would suspect its power and yet strong enough to pull a grown woman into the depths of the ocean, fighting for her life. As if she could sense my fear and hesitation, she pulled me close to her and kissed me again. In that split second I had an image of Jenny, and began to wonder what she would do if she found out, if this would break her heart the way she had torn mine apart a few months earlier. But I didn't want to hurt Jenny, I certainly wasn't doing it for that. And yet, if I was to carry on with this then she would inevitably find out and I would cause her a great deal of pain. So was it worth it? I tried to weigh up what I might gain and what I would lose if I followed Nette up the beach, but I was in no fit state to weigh anything up at all. I couldn't think straight. I really felt that I could not and should

not go with Nette but at the same time it felt as if I didn't have the slightest ounce of strength in me to refuse her.

I felt her hand round the back of my neck as she drew my mouth once more to her's. I felt the waves crashing over me again but just at that point I suddenly pushed her away. She looked startled and took a step back from me.

“I thought you wanted to...” she said.

“I did, I do....but I can't. I just can't.”

I slept very little that night. After running back to the studio I had climbed into bed next to Jenny and snuggled up against her warm body. I wasn't sure if she was awake or not and so was slightly surprised when after a few minutes she said,

“I'm so glad you came back”

If she felt my heart beating at a dangerously high rate she said nothing about it and after a few minutes appeared to go off to sleep. I lay staring up at the white ceiling.

The lights from the road outside were enough to make me be able to spot some black smudges on the paintwork where some unsuspecting mosquitoes had had their lives brutally cut short by a previous occupant wielding a newspaper. Daylight was appearing by the time I eventually managed to drop off and then I slept right through 'til the early afternoon. Jenny had obviously gone down to the beach but had left me a little note saying she hoped that I'd slept well and that she still loved me even though I was now officially an “older lesbian”.

\*

There were two more days to go before our flight home. I could think of nothing else but Nette and what had happened, or rather what had not happened between us. I longed to see her again but at the same time I was terrified of doing so fearing that it was not in my power to be able to refuse her advances more than once. But she was not at the beach nor around our usual bar that evening and a tiny part of me was very slightly relieved since if she had been near me I knew that I wouldn't have been able to keep anything together at all. Jenny asked me a couple of times why I was being so quiet. I lamely said something about how the party and the whole experience had done me in a bit. The next day I finally caught sight of Nette. She was walking with Angelica by the shops and Jenny said “Hi” and Angelica said that they'd both hired a car that day to travel up to a resort

on the north coast. Nette and I hung quietly beside our respective girlfriends like two children being picked up from school whose mothers are chatting away between themselves. I tried to catch her eye but she was either looking down, or at Jenny. We all said goodbye and wandered off in separate directions.

The day came for us to return to London. Jenny and I had a final swim in the sea and then a shower and afterwards we threw our beach towels in the bin since they wouldn't be dry in time to pack. The taxi arrived and the cases were loaded into the boot. Mandy and Stella came to see us off along with Monica and Danielle. Elena had already left the island and Debs and Susan were still at the resort but nowhere to be seen even though we'd made sure to tell them what time we were going. We all kissed and hugged goodbye and then I sat in the back seat when suddenly Jenny said she had to nip out to go to the cash point. Nette wouldn't have known what time I was leaving but I was still hoping against hope that somehow she might miraculously turn up. The others were all chatting away by the roadside and I was alone in the car feeling sick to my stomach. All that I wanted to do with every part of my being was to go and find Nette and to hold her and never let her go. So what was stopping me? Why was I going along with this whole charade? I knew that I must stay in the taxi, that this was the life I had chosen, this was what I wanted, wasn't it? But still I could feel my stomach clenching into a tight painful knot and my head spinning with confusion.

"Come on Jenny", I was thinking, "Let's just get the hell out of here..." But she still didn't appear and then suddenly out of nowhere I saw Nette. She was making her way towards the taxi with Angelica following and shouting something at her. Angelica tried to grab Nette's arm to hold her back from coming over but Nette pulled away and ran up to the car. I was still sitting in the back seat with the window open and before I knew it she leant over and kissed me. Angelica came up right behind her, pulled her away from the car and shouted something in Dutch. All the other women around were dumbstruck except Monica who came straight over and with a fiery look in her eyes said, "What the hell's going on?"

Nette started calling out to me, “We can be together, you know we can make it work. You don’t have to go away, stay with me.”

At this point Jenny returned and very quickly took in the whole situation. She said to Angelica “Take her away, NOW!” And Angelica literally frog-marched Nette from the scene. I could see that Nette’s rage had now turned to sorrow and she was clearly sobbing as she was being dragged away. It was more than I could bear to watch and I jumped out of the taxi and started to run over to her but Jenny held me back and gently said: “Come on darling, we have to go home.”

Then she helped me back into the taxi and I sat there, in the back seat, feeling like someone who had just been arrested who was being forced into a police car.

But this was not against my will, I was doing it voluntarily. I was choosing to leave the only woman I wanted in the world right now for Jenny, who at this point felt like a complete stranger to me. I realised that I hadn’t even got a phone number for Nette so I knew that if I left her now I could never change my mind again after this day. It seemed like the hardest decision I’d ever had to make in my life. My head was aching with confusion and lust in equal measure and it felt like some sort of drug had been released into my brain that I was totally powerless to resist with only the inferior weapons of logic and will-power. Nette and Angelica were almost out of sight now and as they turned a street that took them out of my view I knew that it was now or never, I had to make my choice.

My eyes filled up with tears and my stomach turned over once again as the taxi pulled away from the square. I felt physically sick with pain and longing and yet I stayed put in that car as it began the long windy mountainous journey across the island to the airport which would then take me on a flight back to England and my home with my girlfriend and all the remaining years of my life that I would spend without seeing Nette ever again.

## **International Women's Day**

### **Jean Taylor**

On 8 March 1908, womyn textile workers in New York took to the streets to protest about their unsafe work places and their meagre pay. It wasn't the first time womyn had gone on strike to protest about low wages and untenable conditions in the workplace. And it certainly wouldn't be the last. To honour and commemorate the courage of these striking womyn workers as well as make a demand for womyn's right to vote, Clara Zetkin put a proposal to the second International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen in 1910 that 8 March be designated as International Women's Day. This led to an annual IWD celebration in many countries round the world as womyn united to continue the struggle for survival and recognition of their rights and to acknowledge the considerable contribution womyn had always made and continued to make to society generally.

It wasn't till 5 March 1928 that the first IWD rally in Australia was held in the Domain Park in Sydney. The first IWD marches were held in Sydney and Melbourne in March 1931. The early IWD marches were predominantly organised by the womyn of the Communist Party of Australia and other womyn's groups and later in conjunction with the Union of Australian Women. Anna Morgan, an Aboriginal activist, spoke about the need for legislative changes to enable Aboriginal people full access to their rights, at the IWD rally in Melbourne in March 1934.

After the WLM had been organising political activities in Melbourne for a couple of years, the biggest IWD rally and march ever seen in Melbourne was organised by the Women's March Action Campaign, made up of womyn from the Women's Action Committee, the UAW and other womyn's organisations and held on 11 March 1972. Approximately 3000 womyn attended the rally in the City Square to hear womyn speak and then marched to the Treasury Gardens afterwards for street theatre and stalls.

Every year since then, the IWD rally and march in Melbourne continued to be a rallying point for lesbians, feminists and womyn generally and in solidarity with womyn

round the world. As womyn in a patriarchal society we not only wanted to celebrate the gains we'd made but at the same time we were only too well aware that there'd be a long hard fight before we could free ourselves and all womyn from oppression.

By the new millennium that early excitement and political impetus had died down somewhat. Even so, there were several events organised in Melbourne in 2011 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of IWD on 8 March. These included an IWD Rally at the State Library and a march to parliament house organised by the Freedom Socialist Party; a Cocktail Party organised by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and Victorian Trades Hall Council at the Bella Union Bar at Trades Hall with speakers Ged Kearney and Melba Marginson; and the 2011 Public Oration with speaker Mary Wooldridge, the Minister for Women's Affairs, was held at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre.

Join Women on the Bridge, a rally for peace and womyn's rights was held on the Sandringham Bridge in Southbank; a concert, Half the Sky, organised by the International Women's Development Agency with Claire Bowditch, Deborah Conway & Willy Zygier, Stiff Gins, Sally Dastey, Lucie Thorne, The Red Brigade and The Town Bikes, was held at the Thornbury Theatre; and a womyn writers session was held at Readings Bookshop in Carlton in conjunction with Kill Your Darlings with writers Louise Swinn, Sophie Cunningham and Monica Dux.

On 15 March, the Victorian Women's Trust, YWCA, League of Women Voters and the National Council of Women Victoria organised a Public Lecture with Frances Bedford talking about the feminist activist Muriel Matters plus a performance by the Brunswick Women's Choir in the Welsh Church in La Trobe Street; and on 18 March, the Union of Australian Women IWD celebration included the Guest Speaker, Mary Crooks, Director of the Victorian Women's Trust, at Ross House in Flinders Lane.

The IWD event I went to was the Jan Gladys Testro Memorial Lesbian Art Exhibition at the Narelle Byrne Gallery in High Street Kew, 5 - 13 March. This exhibition not only celebrated the 100th anniversary of IWD but was organised to commemorate the first anniversary of Jan's death. Over twenty

lesbian artists, including myself, exhibited their work, which ranged in style from oil, acrylic, water and silk paintings to photos, felt, ceramics, fabric, carvings and other installations.

The public opening was held on 5 March with several artists giving a brief talk about their work and why the exhibition was important to them. The lesbian opening was held on 8 March with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri people, and the opening speech was made by Judith Brookes who had been the curator of the first Women's Gallery in Brunswick Street, 1989 - 1995. This was followed by a concert to pay tribute to Jan's achievement as a lesbian feminist activist over many years and in particular for helping to organise the first Lesbian Art Exhibitions in Melbourne, 1996 - 1999. We also mentioned other lesbian artists and their supporters who had died and ended the evening with more food and drink and conversation.

The 100th anniversary of this significant womyn's event was not only an opportunity to reflect on the achievements we had made as lesbians and feminists over this past century but it also enabled us to get together and celebrate our own small accomplishments in the face of the racism, lesbophobia and sexism that Indigenous womyn, lesbians and womyn still have to contend with on a daily basis. In fact, given the capitalist-induced economic downturn, the threat of global warming and the myriad of personal insults to our intelligence and humanity on a regular basis, for lesbians and womyn to be celebrating at all, let alone an 100 year anniversary, is no small achievement.

## **Gray Is Good: Pacific Northwest Old Lesbians Meet**

**Carol Anne Douglas**

More than 200 lesbians over 60 met at the Pacific Northwest Regional meeting of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) held in Tacoma, Washington, on July 28-31. (I don't live in the Pacific Northwest, but all OLOC members are welcome to come regional meetings. I'm an OLOC member, not a "neutral" observer.)

But telling the who, when, what, and where doesn't convey the excitement of seeing large conference rooms full of mostly white-haired lesbians. More than 30 women age 75 or older attended. At least 10 were over 80. A similar number were on scooters. Unlike anywhere else in our culture, OLOC meetings make you glad to be old. OLOC sells T-shirts saying "This is what an old lesbian looks like."

Led by four women who called themselves the Gang of Four, Puget Sound OLOC put together an amazing three days of events. Like all OLOC conferences, this was held in a hotel. OLOC works with the hotel staff on accessibility.

The keynote speaker was lesbian historian Lillian Faderman, author of *Surpassing the Love of Men*, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, and *Chloe Plus Olivia*. She told of famous women whose passion for other women has been covered up—and how archives are still covering it up. She read us steaming (not just romantic) letters from Emily Dickinson, Margaret Sanger, and early twentieth-century Communist leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Would you believe that archives still consult the relatives of long-dead women about whether to let anyone read their letters? Who would imagine that Sanger's great nephews worry about preserving her respectability? ("Respectability?" Sure, that's what Margaret Sanger cared about.)

Faderman told us there was a lesbian first lady. Besides Eleanor Roosevelt. Rose Cleveland, sister of Grover. When Grover was first elected, he was unmarried, and the acting first lady was Rose, who was carrying on an affair with a woman who unfortunately married a bishop.



Thrilling as Faderman was, the highlight of the conference was several panels of old lesbians telling about their lives and their work building community.

I can describe only a few speakers, but there were many.

Shan Elaine Ottey of Radical Rabbit Media, a producer-director of lesbian feminist films, told her experience as a butch who rebelled at Stonewall. The police arrested her and the court sentenced her to 90 days at Rikers Island. She served the whole term, and guards beat her often, deriding her because she was a butch. When she spoke, many of us were in tears. I didn't know that happened at Stonewall. We certainly need to know our history better.

Morgan Ahern, a Romani/Gypsy woman, founder of Lolo Diklo: Romani Against Racism, told about the oppression of Romani. She grew up in a town in New York State where many people are the descendants of Romani who Europeans brought to this country as slaves—yes, slaves. Romani who fled the Holocaust also live in that community. Like Native American children, some Romani children, including Ahern, were taken from their homes by state officials and forced to go to Roman Catholic boarding schools. She escaped, but there was nowhere to go and nothing to do but cadging a living selling (and taking) drugs on the streets of New York City.

But someone took her in and helped her try to sober up: lesbian writer Jill Johnston (who died this summer). Ahern gave Johnston her heartfelt thanks. But Ahern's life didn't change completely overnight. She wound up in the New York Women's House of Detention. There she heard crowds calling out the name of another woman: Angela Davis, whose name Ahern had never heard before. Davis, in an isolation cell, called out asking the other women in the jail to speak their names. Then she asked the crowd to chant them. It was a life-changing experience for Ahern when the crowd called out "Hurray Morgan!"

OLOC didn't just talk about prison. It is committed to activism as well as celebration of old lesbians' lives. A group of conference participants joined the local chapter of the National Organization for Women in a demonstration at Tacoma's federal detention center in support of immigrant women the government is holding for deportation. The protestors said they couldn't see or hear any of the prisoners inside, but they hoped

the prisoners heard them calling out "Shame! Shame!" The protestors saw only guards, one of whom photographed them.

Not many days later the government temporarily released a woman whose detention they had protested, Tara Ammons Cohen. Cohen had been in detention for two years. The government plans to deport her to Mexico though she has lived in the United States almost all her life and doesn't speak Spanish.

But the conference was more focused on the politics of community building than on protest. One plenary session was devoted to women discussing forms of community ranging from land communities to senior housing. Membership in some land collectives has dwindled, and new members don't necessarily have the same vision as earlier members. However, lesbian RV communities in Arizona and Washington State are flourishing, as are some communities in which women each own their own house.

Tita Caldwell of San Francisco, a member of Bay Area OLOC, lives in affordable senior housing in San Francisco, and six other old lesbians live in the same project. She urged lesbians, especially in areas with nondiscrimination laws, to work to create space in senior housing where lesbians feel free to be out. She has learned that managers of senior housing respond when she invokes the law to demand conditions under which residents can be out comfortably, such as providing space for lesbian events.

There were many wonderful speakers, but I hadn't planned to report on the conference and didn't take notes. There were many more tales of joy, pain, and struggling. There were panels on visibility, sparking action, and intersecting oppressions. Workshop subjects included aging into disabilities and organizing for change, networking via computer, and writing from the right side of your brain.

Conference participants ranged from a woman who had traveled around the world on a yacht alone with her partner (to the astonishment of men in all the countries they visited) to those living subsidized housing, and speakers showed awareness that most old lesbians are poor. However, some discussions seemed to be based on the assumption that all of us would be able to retire. But when someone in the audience said that wasn't necessarily true, and that OLOC presentations needed to

include discussion of how old lesbians who can't retire will survive, the organizers immediately responded positively to that suggestion.

Even the "name" speakers and entertainers at OLOC meetings participate in the whole conference and are ready to talk with everyone. French Canadian singer/songwriter Lucie Blue Tremblay, who sang on Saturday evening, was eagerly organizing for lesbian space and reviving women's music. Tremblay is so committed to lesbians that she has gone to an assisted living facility to sing for a lesbian who lived there.

I've been to many women's conferences, but I've never seen any where the participants were as welcoming as those OLOC organizes. (I also attended the national conference in Cleveland last year.) I've found them a joy to attend. This year's conference even had sessions on "laughing yoga" to encourage lesbians to laugh more. And the Friday night dance started early in the evening, a feature some of us appreciated.

One panel was composed of lesbians over 80 telling their life stories. It shouldn't be unusual to have a panel of women over 80, but it is. OLOC is working to make that less unusual.

Life stories were the heart of the meeting. For years, OLOC's oral herstory project has recorded the lives of lesbians over 70. The opening night entertainment featured a local theater group reading parts of other old lesbians' stories of isolation, struggling to come out, and life after coming out.

Most attendees were white. Last year, after holding workshops on racism at its Cleveland conference, OLOC formed a task force on race and class and will focus on racism at its next annual meeting in Boston next summer.

OLOC registration forms always include a space urging those who can to contribute extra to help lower-income lesbians come to the conference. I've met women who said they came only because OLOC covered their costs.

Younger partners of old lesbians who attend the conference can also attend.

OLOC holds national conferences every other year. The next national conference will be held in Boston, July 19-22, 2012. You can find out more about OLOC at [www.oloc.org](http://www.oloc.org).

## **Butch Voices 2011 Conference Re-Cap**

### **Carrie Kholi**

The 2011 BUTCH Voices conference, entitled, “Sustaining our Movement: Building for the Future,” featured a performance night, film night, and highly-anticipated critical breakout sessions. Keynote speakers included Lambda Literary Award-winning authors, Sharon Bridgforth and Alice Y. Hom. Over 450 people attended the event held at the Oakland City Marriott.

Last year, at one of the regional conferences, Hom said, “I organized and presented a panel called, ‘Bromance, Kinship, and Mandates: Unveiling Taboo Topics. [This year,] I’m looking forward to [engaging] with butches of all stripes and people of various gender identifications. I want to have conversations, learn from others ... and experience the thrill of seeing all of us basking in the beauty of love & community with all of our differences & contradictions.”

The 2011 BUTCH Voices conference boasted four days’ worth of education and entertainment. However, in a space filled with self-identified butches and allies ranging from ages 16 to 67. The Brown Boi Project’s youth initiative organized many of the young participants to attend. There was much serious work to be done.

Workshops ranged from topics such as “Two-Spirits: Bridging Gender and Generations,” to “Homophobia: Bullying and Suicide Prevention,” and even “Mayuca, from the bottom of my heart: A Mexicana Story of Butch-Boi Culture & Identity, and “Butch and Pregnant: What do I wear and What should you call me?”

“There were overwhelming responses of how amazing the space was,” reports BUTCH Voices founder, Joe Leblanc. “[I kept hearing] how welcome people felt, and the diversity of attendees. People [were] talking about how much they gained by having youth there, elders there, two spirits there....you name it.”

Amidst these powerful workshops, BUTCH Voices also organized a community town hall meeting to engage with and

address many of the concerns raised immediately prior to the conference.

While some members of the community previously viewed adding “Masculine of Center” to the BUTCH Voices mission statement as anti-feminist, anti-womanist, and anti-lesbian heritage, BUTCH Voices president, Kryss Freeman, and the rest of the BUTCH Voices board members reminded conference attendees that MoC was a term created and engaged from a place of inclusion and love.

“I understand that, to many, from the outside, I am what I am: butch,” states Freeman. “However, when growing up as a somewhat androgynous African-American teen in NY, and then later engaging in LGBTQ and Trans activism and ally-work in LA and Oakland, I found that “butch” has not always been the most welcoming term to a lot of women—women across a huge span of cultures and age groups. The more BUTCH Voices speaks with multi-cultural members of our community, the more we find this to be true. I, and the rest of the BUTCH Voices board members, find it necessary to be proactive about engaging new language. It will change whether we move with it or stand against it.”

During the town hall meeting, participants discussed how MoC as a term and identity location was created out of a feminist framework, in order to address the breadth and depth of the various identities unable to find a home under the term “butch.”

“Butch has always had the head seat at the table,” said Leblanc. “This is because so many White butch women have used this language to set the table, set the stage, set the history books. Everyone else was just expected to fall in line. But, for so many butches, the term just does not fit. We try to instill that, at a conference called BUTCH Voices, there are experiences and values, in addition to a host of other commonalities that they can use to connect—it doesn’t always have to be around language. We do this because we recognize that butch is not the ‘end all, be all’ descriptor, neither is stud, neither is masculine of center. Each identity has its own heritage/her/his- tory involving culture, race, region, class. Each deserves an equitable seat at the table.”

After a conference filled with pressing discussions, in addition to emotional highs and lows, community connecting, and pushes towards real and positive personal and social change, BUTCH Voices still highlights its work as a pro-feminist and pro-womanist social justice organization working to achieve gender equity.

“Inclusion and acceptance without favoritism,” says BUTCH Voices. “No one identity over another—each with a valued seat at the table and voice that should be respected and heard.”

Presently, BUTCH Voices is throwing its support behind Chaz Bono, a newly-transitioned transman, and his appearance on television’s, “Dancing With the Stars.” In the coming year, BUTCH Voices is looking to add more board members, steering committee co-chairs, coordinators, and subcommittee members in all areas.

“We must grow internally to be any good externally,” comments Freeman in regards to the BUTCH Voices new member search. Interested community members are advised to send resumes to [Joe@butchvoices.com](mailto:Joe@butchvoices.com). In addition to their resume, they should include a cover letter expressing area(s) in which they might be interested in working.

For more information on BUTCH Voices, visit <http://butchvoices.com> or <http://www.facebook.com/butchvoices>. You can also follow BUTCH VOICES ([@BUTCHVoices](https://twitter.com/BUTCHVoices)) on Twitter.



## Book Reviews

**Cow** (North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Spinifex Press, 2011) by Susan Hawthorne

Reviewed by Merry Gangemi

Several nights running, after reading another string of Hawthorne's magical new book of poems, *Cow*, I settled down and let my imagination out to pasture, hanging out with Queenie, and Electra, and Sita, and Fatima, each fascinating character eliciting more and more curiosity about their minds and personalities.

Through her mystical and elegant language, her *Sprachgitter*,<sup>1</sup> Susan Hawthorne proffers readers expansive possibilities to reinterpret the lost reference points and metaphors of feminist and lesbian-feminist existence, "the song half forgotten half remembered (119). *Cow* is herstory "swathed in a cloth of sound." illuminations of the old phallogocentric myths in lyrical language, a *Weltsicht* that offers an "eternal counterpoint/ whose coda is a single/ jubilant/ voice" (119). *Cow* is also a wonderful exhilarating manifestation of lesbian-feminist scholarship and arts, connecting to what Bonnie Zimmerman identifies as "the most important myth for any community... its myth of origins."<sup>2</sup>

Language is Hawthorne's *métier*; she conjures cinematic emersion into a verbal, carnal, spiritual world without parameters and expectations, the phallogocentric, Greco-Roman myths reconfigured; the violence and miasma of patriarchy wrested away from the silences of "unspoken histories/ genocides/eliminations of the unwanted/ every rewriting of history continues that erasure" (4).

*Cow* is an experience of myth exploded into alliteration and rhythm:

tales are long and short

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<sup>1</sup> German: "language mesh" (103).

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman. *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969–1989*. Boston: Beacon, 1990, p.

they tangle like a chinese noodle in a spiral  
a spaghetti in a stretch  
a snarl of time  
a skein of story

the strings are struck  
in exquisite proportion  
consonance of lambda  
stories told by Chloe and Olivia  
by Gertrude and Alice (11)

Woolf, Stein, and Toklas aside, the cross-references Hawthorne embroiders—both obvious and subtle—are exciting and layered. The text is fluid yet linear, its rhymes and lyrical verses moving inexorably toward what French-Algerian philosopher Hélène Cixous calls “forward in the axe’s light.”<sup>3</sup>

“[W]e were oracles” Hawthorne’s Queenie explains, “our pronouncements not to be messed with” (57). Of course those pronouncements were messed with, repeatedly and violently sundering female power from male power, redacting the role of women to reflect the hierarchies within the pantheon of male deities:

in another time  
a later time  
when gods and demons  
had forgotten how to be immortal  
they joined forces to create a nectar of immortality  
these boys took their time  
they carried in Mount Mandara  
turned it upside down  
placed it upon the back of the tortoise  
demons on one side  
gods the other  
each held the world snake  
twirled the mountain top for a thousand years  
back forwards  
back forwards  
again and again and again  
the best they could manage was deadly poison (50)

---

<sup>3</sup> Hélène Cixous. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993, p. 57.



The mythologies of the ancient world have many elements in common: Gilgamesh and Noah; Adam and Eve/Izanagi and Izanami; the Great Flood, the ancient cedars of Mesopotamia and the Hebrew tabernacle, Ishtar and Persephone, Perseus and Moses; Prometheus and Isaac; Jesus and Isaac; the Golden Calf and the Moon Bull—to name just a few. Each myth is intricately bound to male primacy and no matter how powerful the female deity she is always and forever subject to the control of gods. Goddesses continually occupy a subordinated and prurient position in hagiologies. Sex, as the origin of all sin, squarely pinpoints women as perpetrators. Pandora and Eve are still used as rationalizations for misogyny, oppression, and femicide. As Thomas Aquinas decreed in his *Woman as Derived Being*, “woman is defective and misbegotten.”<sup>4</sup>

Australian poet Susan Hawthorne has struck gold with *Cow*—creating a vigorous, playful, philosophical neo-perspective, “ein Blick<sup>5</sup> into another world” (3). “[T]he cow” Hawthorne tells us in the very first poem, “is at the limits of my thinking” (3), but one quickly discerns that the word “limits” is a counter-metaphor for the expansiveness of imagination, a response the ultimately futile attempt to control the female imagination:

I'm the flood at every birth  
 the drought at every death  
 beyond each gateway is a path  
 that leads directly to me  
 if you can't find me  
 look among the reeds by the river (41)

The cows of *Cow* have claimed “the lambda letter/ from the snake’s mouth” (62), and understand, by standing their ground, the clarity of “the moment when I hear/ unspoken histories/ genocides/ eliminations of the unwanted/ every rewriting of history continues that erasure” (4).

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas. “Woman as Derived Being,” in *History of Ideas on Women*. Rosemary Agonito, ed. NY: Perigree, 1977, p.85

<sup>5</sup> German: “a view, a look” (3).

*Cow* is about our lives of women, our legacies, our still extant nightmares of not being valued. It is also about our integral connection with the natural world, and it is about the transformative power of language, the raw force of words redefined, retranslated, and restored:

I dig for language uprooting words  
from the trail of historical  
syntax across continents  
down through the tap roots  
the shapes of letters and words  
frizzing on the edge of a root (78)

*Cow* is structured into strings, which function as chapters. These strings also function as a grounding reference to string theory, which seeks to analyze vibrations as the source of all energy, i.e., the source of all life. That “the string must be stretched under tension in order to become excited”<sup>6</sup> underscores the universal and constant stresses of being a woman, different, lesbian. Within each string, Queenie—the philosophy cow—and her “horned goddesses” tell their stories: “facts and imagination tangle/ a weave of uncertain strings/strings pulled and plucked/ edgeless origami in an unfolding universe” (7).

There are wonderful moments of rhyme and rhythm in *Cow*; “what she sings to her maiden aunt” is a delicious reference to Emily Dickinson, the patriarchal spin on a so-called emotional recluse spinster, who, juxtaposed under Hawthorne’s pen becomes a foremother, a subversive feminist, the poet “of rebellion and wild love... who never felt disgrace”:

you who sing and dance  
your flamboyant style is profound  
I read your hands slant my maiden aunt

you who heard my wish

---

<sup>6</sup> The official String Theory Website.  
<http://superstringtheory.com/basics/index.html>,  
accessed 09/03/2011.

smiled said yes and more  
I read your fingers slant my maiden aunt (130)

and here, in “what we sing in one voice”:

sing sing into night for we are eine Frau  
we sit together on the bough  
we women who walk at night  
go out to the world of cow  
exiled in Moscow Kracow and Macau (132)

*Cow* is about our shared herstory and the unearthing of truth. Fatima, and Meena, Sita, and Electra are our mythical embodiments and together with Queenie ruminate on the physicality of being a cow, the amazing diversity of cows, the brilliance of the rediscovered “lexicon a spin of thread” (77):

Io is a white cow a moon cow  
the golden calf is a sun cow  
the blue cow is a sea cow  
the red cow is a menstruating girl  
the black cow is the new moon  
the starless sky before the cow spills her milky stars (7)

Queenie knows “cows who do impossible things,” who defy gravity and jumped the moon way before there were rockets. Queenie says poems about creation and migration, enslavement and escape, deep love and comfort, creativity, and history. “Queenie twirls grass in her mouth/ making a strand of wicker/ she bends a curl/ a centerpiece/ combines it with others/ builds on it/ going round in circles/ like stories that intertwine/ going on forever” (29).

There is a marvelous sensuality to the poems, tenderness unimaginable in the old narratives of Persephone, Pandora, Hathor, or Kalypso. Yet, men are not reviled in *Cow*, they are observed and assessed. They are not judged, per se; their cruelty and dominance is accepted as part of their nature, rooted in physical violence and devouring rage at a woman’s presumption of what is reasonable behavior, as in “what Cow and Tiger say”:

a cow and a tiger how should they meet in a poem?

logic demands that carnivore	eat herbivore
unsurprisingly	Cow has a better idea
<i>let's have a conversation</i>	
says Cow	
<i>you sit there and I'll sit here</i>	<i>and we will talk</i>
but says Tiger	<i>before talk I must eat</i>
<i>no way</i>	
says Cow	
<i>every civilized being knows</i>	<i>talking and eating go together</i>
Tiger takes action	leaps for the throat
<i>no eat no talk says Tiger</i>	mouth full of flesh (54)

The excitement in *Cow* is unmistakable; the idea of anthropomorphic relevance churns into another realm of consciousness, and in pulling this off so authentically, Hawthorne convinces us that such a story is not “any less believable/ than tales of dragons/ or wars/ or magic/ or love” (154). It’s a book of poems for poets—and for non-poets; a book that reads like a novel and the poet’s imagination and language are an unbeatable combination in women’s writing:

your poems are like temples  
 elaborate and multi-hued  
 run your tongue over their surfaces  
 feel the sculptured complexity  
 hear the ornamental words  
 thrill to their sounds  
 their peaks and troughs  
 soaring pitch and indigo roar (95)

Susan Hawthorne has written “poems/ thrilling to a music that lifts you daily celebrating/ unbelievable truths *halleluiah alleluia* they cry.” Indeed. *Cow* is a triumph.

**The Virgin** (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2008) by Hannah Blue Herron.

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

The novel *The Virgin* takes us back to the time when women were revered. Hannah Blue Herron has chosen to write about the time when the invaders from the North, the Nomads,

brought their god, Enlil, and changed many women's lives.

The women have a temple to Inanna, their own customs, celebrations and festivals. We get a taste of what they have and had. For generations it has always been like this. They are vegetarians and raise their own food.

This was a time when lesbians were women who were honored and raised their own children together. They solved the problem of fertility by creating a ritual in the temple where men came to worship Inanna and be brought to ecstasy by rituals performed by the virgin of the night.

Only occasionally a woman would become pregnant with no male intervention. This was in the way of a miracle but it happened to Kasha and she became the high priestess when the former high priestess died.

Mostly, women knew who the fathered their child, but the men were never told who she was if she was a girl. Boys were raised until they were 7 and then returned to their father or adopted out to another man.

Hannah Blue Heron brings this time to mind when women lived in their own villages under their own governance. Men were traders or built things like looms, wheels for pottery, invented what sounds very much like a wheelbarrow—an upright wheel with handles for carrying things. This was the Bronze Age and there were knives useful for cutting branches off trees. There were hatchets. The women traded herbs and weaving for these tools.

Then Enlil's followers began to harass the Inanna worshipers, the men as well as the women whom they called whores. The god Enlil demanded that each man have a wife subservient to him and Enlil worshipers began to burn the villages down including the temple.

They are warned by one of the male Inanna worshipers that they have twelve hours to pack and leave. They pack what they can using the wheel carts. They are told they have to climb a mountain and that on the other side they will find fertile land to live on.

However because of the time of year, it is fall moving into winter, they will have to learn to shoot rabbits and deer with bows and arrows. This horrifies them but in order survive being vegetarians will not be enough, they have to learn how to make

boots out of deerskin and rabbit boots for the children.

They find shelter in caves and, when the cave is occupied, they smoke her or him out. A bear does not take kindly to this and claws one woman.

Hannah Blue Heron has a Master's Degree in theology from Notre Dame she is familiar with Catholic ritual, so I couldn't help seeing Moses bringing his people to the Promised Land. Unlike Moses, Ashannah is able to enjoy the new land she has brought her women to.

Hannah Blue Herron has taken us on a journey into the past and leaves us with an understanding of how the male patriarchy came to be.

There were good men and good women back then and peace. The goddess Inanna brought peace to her children. The god brought death and destruction and has continued to bring us that to this day.

We are confronted again and again by the genie they have unleashed and can no longer control. Where do we bury this uranium and plutonium? How do we tell the generations that follow us where the danger lies ten thousand years from now?

*The Virgin* is a wonderful reconstruction of a time when women and children loved each other and the goddess was worshiped. A good read for the summer.

## Contributors

**Elizabeth Bradfield** is the author of two poetry collections: *Approaching Ice* and *Interpretive Work*. Her poems have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Believer*, *Poetry* and she has received the Audre Lorde Prize and a Stegner Fellowship, among other honors. Founder and editor-in-chief of Broadside Press, she lives on Cape Cod and works as a naturalist and teacher.

**Nickole Brown's** *Sister*, a novel-in-poems, was published by Red Hen. The title poem from her forthcoming collection, *A Book of Birds*, won AROHO's 2010 *Orlando Prize*. In 2009, she received an NEA fellowship. She worked at Sarabande for ten years, and for the past four at Arktoi Books and the Marie Alexander Series. Currently, she teaches at Murray State and University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

**Melissa Buckheit's** poetry, interviews, translations, reviews and photography have appeared or are forthcoming in *Shearsman Journal*, *Bombay Gin*, *nth position*, *The Drunken Boat*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *U of A Poetry Center Newsletter*, *Culthroat: A Journal of the Arts*, *Spiral Orb*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *A Trunk of Delirium*, *Eyewear*, and *Sonora Review*. *Noctilucent*, a full-length poetry collection, is forthcoming from Shearsman Books in the UK, in 2012, and a chapbook, *Arc*, was published in 2007. Melissa studied Literature, Poetry, Dance, Theatre and French at Brandeis University and has an MFA in Poetry from Naropa University. She teaches Writing and Literature at the University of Arizona and Pima College, is an Orthopedic Massage Therapist, a Choreographer/Dance Teacher, and curates the Edge Series for Emerging and Younger Writers. She lives in Tucson, AZ with her partner and son.

**Joanna Cattonar** is a QLFHD [queerlesbianfemalehomosexuallydyke] of Neapolitan/Istrian, working class descent, born in 1941, raised in the Bronx. She received degrees from Vassar College and Cornell University. She was a founding member of the New Mexico Lesbian Gay Political Alliance and organized the one and only 24-hour marathon of lesbian writers at the old Full Circle Books. Her art and poetry have appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *The San Marcos Review*, as well as in lesbian feminist journals like *Sisterlode* and *The Burning Bush* in New Mexico where she lives with her transgender housemates, Clark, an eleven-year-old brown tabby, and Frankie, a five-month-old mini-German-Shepherd-looking pup.

**Julie Cooper-Fratik** lives with her partner, a conceptual artist/sculptor, in a rural area of Pennsylvania where they tend organic gardens, make and discuss art, enjoy cooking, reading, and taking walks—when they aren't working for money! Julie has been a Fellow at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia, and she is the winner of an Achievement Award in Poetry from The Leeway Foundation in Philadelphia. “Bodies in Intercourse,” a chapter of her book *Beyond the Objects of Desire: The Space of the Poet in the Space of the World*, has been published in *Under the Sun*. She has published poems in, among others, *So To Speak*, *Quarter After Eight*, *the Mississippi Review*, *Slant*, *The Louisville Review*, *Ekphrasis*, *RUNES*, and *Rhino*.

**Rachel Curry** is completing her MFA in Fiction at Northwestern University. She teaches reading and writing at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center's *Free Write Jail Arts & Literacy Program*. Her interview with Susie Bright can be found online in *TriQuarterly*. Rachel was born into an Italian immigrant family in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. She received her undergraduate degree from Ithaca College in 2006. She currently resides in Chicago, Illinois and can be reached at [RachelCurry2012@u.northwestern.edu](mailto:RachelCurry2012@u.northwestern.edu)

**Carol Anne Douglas** worked on the feminist publication *off our backs* from 1973 to 2008.

**Jocelyn Heath** received her MFA in poetry in Spring 2011 from the University of Maryland–College Park. Her poems have appeared in *Poet Lore* and *Avocet: A Journal of Nature Poems*. She reviews poetry books for Lambda Literary, and is currently Assistant Editor with *Smartish Pace*.

**Carrie Y.T. Kholi** is the Creative Director and Founder of Ardor Brand, LLC. and A-List Entertainment & Event Services. She is also the PR & Marketing chair for Philadelphia's, Elements Organization. A PR, marketing, and social media strategist with experience in web marketing, management, instruction and creative development, Kholi is passionate about incorporating new media into everyday branding strategies. With a background in creative writing, event planning, and brand development and management, Kholi's focus brings together new demographics in order to create new narratives. Willfully mixing style, trends, and literary analysis of the latest Nicki Minaj lyrics, [KholiOli.Com](http://KholiOli.Com) (Kholi's personal blog containing business, fashion, and creative tips and trends) occupies a niche for the intellectual consumer, the trendsetting marketing maven, and the entrepreneurially-minded young woman with a passion for both prose *and* primping. Carrie Kholi



is also a PhD student in Literatures in English at Rutgers University and currently resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Marie LaPré Grabon** is a poet and visual artist. She and her partner, Linda Markin, live in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont where they raise chickens, tend gardens and enjoy all four seasons. Marie is also a mother and grandmother and is currently teaching at Johnson State College.

**Lee Lynch** was first published in "The Ladder" in the 1960s. Her books include *Toothpick House*, *Old Dyke Tales* and *The Swashbuckler*, *Sweet Creek* and *Beggar of Love*, all available from Bold Strokes Books at <http://goo.gl/6neqS>. Her recent short stories can be found in *Romantic Interludes* (Bold Strokes Books), *Women In Uniform* (Regal Crest), and [www.readtheselips.com](http://www.readtheselips.com). Lynch's syndicated column, "The Amazon Trail," runs in venues such as "On Top Magazine." She is a recipient of the Alice B. Reader Award for Lesbian Fiction, the James Duggins Mid-Career Author Award and was inducted into the Saints and Sinners Literary Hall of Fame. *Beggar of Love* received the Golden Crown Literary Society Ann Bannon Readers' Choice Award and a ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Award.

**Margarita Miniovich** is a Jewish lesbian writer and poet. She immigrated to Canada from Russia at the age of thirteen. Her work has been published in two issues of *Fireweed*, the anthology *Friday the Rabbi Wore Lace*, and *Milk and Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*. She is the 2010 first prize-winner of the First Person Narrative National Essay Contest run by the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and her essay will be published in the *Keeping Our Stories Alive* anthology. She lives in Toronto with her nine-year-old daughter.

**Ruth Mountaingrove** has published two chapbooks: *Rhythms of Spring* at 22, and *For Those Who Cannot Sleep* at fifty-four the latter being influenced by Carl Young and Gurdjieff before discovering the Women's Movement. Co-editor with Jean Mountaingrove of *WomanSpirit* and *The Blatant Image*. Reach her at [mountaingrove@suddenlink.net](mailto:mountaingrove@suddenlink.net)

**Clare Summerskill** is a writer, a singer-songwriter and a lesbian comedienne. She regularly writes and performs her own one-woman comedy shows and tours them to theatres internationally. She brings "Dyke" humour to the forefront of alternative comedy. Her published works include, *We're the Girls!* from which the story, "Going Dutch" is taken (Diana Publishing 2008) and "Hearing Voices" is a play by Clare,

based entirely on service users' experiences of the mental health system. (Tollington Press 2010). She is currently working on a book of older lesbian and gay men's memories, which is due to be published in 2012. Visit [www.claresummerskill.co.uk](http://www.claresummerskill.co.uk)

**Jean Taylor** is a radical lesbian feminist writer and activist based in Melbourne Australia. Her next book, *Strophy Dykes: Radical Lesbian Feminist Activism in Victoria During the 1980s*, will be published by Dyke Books Inc in 2012.

**Linda Quinlan** grew up in a factory town a few miles from downtown Boston. After being exposed to poetry in junior high school she began to read and then write her own work. Her poetry has been widely published in literary journals including *Sinister Wisdom*, *Pudding*, and *Conditions International*. In college, she worked with Martha Collins and later with Kathleen Spivak at the Harvard Institute of Writing. She was Poet Of The Year in Wisconsin, and, in New Orleans, she was a feature writer for a gay and lesbian newspaper. In Vermont, she started the first and only Lesbian Grandmothers Group and has remained politically active. She's been a welfare mother, a house painter, a bartender, a grants writer, administrator and a factory worker.

**Fran Winant** is a poet, painter, and activist based in New York City. Her work was also published in *Sinister Wisdom* 82.


**Chrystal Wing**'s first novel, *Ariadne's Egg*, was published in 2001 by Mwynhad Press. An excerpt from her second novel, *Ariadne and Harriet* (currently looking for a publisher), won The 2004 Claire of the Moon Award given by The Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. *Calyx Journal* will be publishing a different excerpt from the same novel in their summer issue. Chrystal Wing is a writing teacher at Portland Adult Education and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College.

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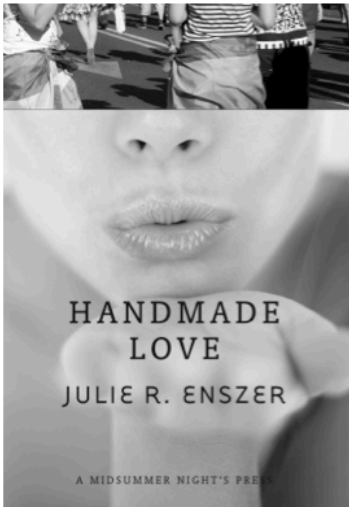
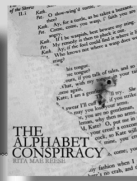
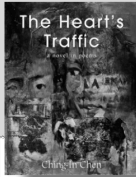
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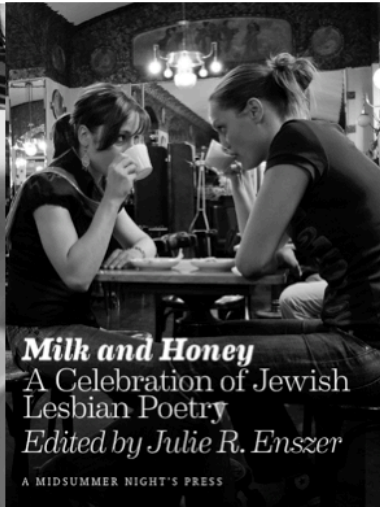
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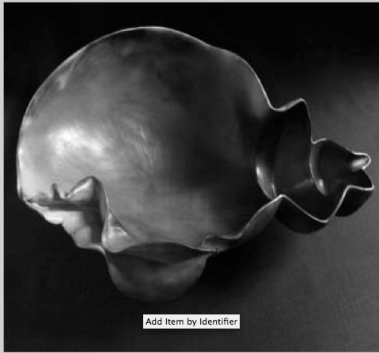
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