

BECAUSE MOURNING SICKNESS  
IS A STAPLE IN MY COUNTRY

This is a collection of poems by working-class dykes who have been going through changes and writing poems, among other things. The book is designed to fit your back pocket.

ms 9d 134758  
25-  
Where are you?  
Have you woven suns  
and stars in your hair?  
Or have the barnacles of  
everyday covered your body?  
Are you a fish swimming upstream  
unseen and unheard--  
Moist words without a mouth.  
\* \* \*

If I had been the white  
working-class woman  
    wife woman  
    mother woman  
replica woman of my  
mother-woman (she is all that)  
years grinding upwards  
feeling life grinding downwards  
to a dead stop  
    may she be dead twice as long  
as she lives, she needs the rest.

I would be a committed woman  
I am, not, that is to say,  
I am a woman that commits  
I commit the felony- loving  
    women.

I commit misdemeanors-  
My child is dirty and she  
    screams in public.

I commit forgery.  
I don't always sign the line  
Lesbian, sometimes just my name.

I commit acts holding me in  
contempt-  
I allow my legs to  
    grow hair.  
I will my muscles to swell  
I growl    I touch myself  
I wear comfortable clothes  
I hex men that bother  
I tell women their men are  
    fuckers  
I tell women they are the  
    strength of the  
    world.

I commit, I will commit, I commit  
myself to committing forever,  
and if this life of crime lays  
me out, if I find myself  
always having to run without  
resting, if they line us up in  
the firing line

Then I will commit suicide and  
drink my own dead blood and bat  
around forever    swooping  
down on anyone who is afraid  
to commit the act of life.

\* \* \*



the other side of the coin

your grandmother thinks  
you're four years old,  
your mother knows you're  
ageless,  
but do you remember a  
few years ago  
when you were so scared  
And I was so desperate?  
That's how old you really are;  
sent away; this time it's  
left, alone.  
From now on your age is-  
time is running out.

When I was much younger  
And didn't fit anywhere,  
I made myself legal,  
without naming it that,  
but doing it that way.  
Too young for the bar  
Too old for blind foot-loose.  
Too queer to hide it  
Too resolute to try.  
I made myself legal.  
I put the whole round  
world in my belly.  
I fed all the protection  
and caring from my head  
to my abdomen,  
until my head was empty  
and my anger was an echo.

And then I wasn't pregnant  
anymore, and I was a  
mother again.  
It seemed so familiar,  
So many lives already spent  
and gone,  
I recognize what I can't  
remember.

Yes there is some discovering,  
No I'm not afraid.  
The mystery is close at hand,  
like unravelling yarn to find  
the beginning knot.  
By the second year I had  
found the knot,  
And it was around my  
neck  
the empty echo had flooded  
crazy- we hated each  
other  
we could not be separated  
w/out bleeding.

There was no way except sleep.  
I found someone new to sleep  
with, to dream with, to forget with.  
Someone who didn't know  
she was sleeping,  
Someone who didn't know  
I was sleeping.  
Her dream world had  
no children; but it was  
the land of opportunity.  
She knew she had some  
keys,  
She was dreaming about  
the door.

As I started waking up  
I was vomiting crazy-  
I sent the child away to  
heal me.  
to pretend it was over.  
I went back to sleep  
and went looking for doors,  
pretending and dreaming are not  
the same. I was not  
pretending. I couldn't ever  
pretend I wanted to hurt.  
Asleep.

Starting to shake when the  
child came back,  
It was not over.  
I was waking up w/the  
same nightmare and this  
time there was more.  
Worlds asleep are the same  
as worlds awake. They  
hold the same secrets.

I knew I'd been  
asleep but I didn't know  
for how long. Awake.  
Pretending and dreaming are  
not the same. I could not  
pretend what I had been  
dreaming.  
There wasn't no doors  
cause we didn't have no  
keys, the child and I  
together made each other  
legal, and that was the  
last thing I realized  
before I went to sleep.

My sister came to stay.  
She was jaundiced from  
hiding, we were both so  
weak from sleeping.  
We started shaking each  
other awake. We decided  
to always keep doing it,  
We started learning to go  
in thru the windows and  
throw shit at the doors.  
And fuck those keys.

There's more than just  
two of us shaking each other.  
We're still just starting  
to learn to go in thru  
the windows and throw  
shit at the doors. And  
fuck those keys.

That is learning how to  
not be legal and live.  
That is learning how to  
bleed w/out losing it all  
to sleep- so you can  
dream what you can't pretend.

Every person who cares  
about the child or I has  
added more yarn.  
It's true the mystery is  
solved but the knot is  
still tied.  
We've both accepted the  
extensions, we've both  
begged for them sometimes.  
Who wants to choke?  
Who wants to watch?

Yes we must be separate.  
Yes we will bleed.  
We have no choice but  
to learn not to lose it all.  
In the bleeding, in the  
fear, in the ache.  
Maybe it's just guilt  
but it does feel like heart  
break.  
It's legal to tie the knot  
but more than taboo to  
untie it.  
The only thing I see  
is to cut it clean and  
run fast.  
So I sharpen my knife  
and look at the map.

\* \* \*



There is only one way that I  
have found to have a  
choice,  
in my living this time around,  
and that is to steal the  
alternative,  
to bury a few hours in  
the back yard,  
keep on doing it until  
there's a day full of  
underground.

Stealing ain't free,  
that idea is more of  
the same dead dream,  
that has kept us waiting  
and looking  
for the right door, the  
right person, the right way  
to say what can't be said,  
w/out feeling the hanging  
knot jerk tighter,  
w/out finding yourself in  
the no action file,  
where Mr. Powermind's  
electronic censor is so busy,  
spreading apart our consciousness,  
throwing handfuls of straw  
across frozen fields;  
where you wake up  
looking out your window  
and find that you're  
inside the walls of the  
concentration camp,  
your bed is a board,  
the water is truth serum,  
and you've got thirty seconds  
to save your life by  
killing yourself.

\* \* \*

Yesterday I was in green velvet  
standing sentence at your wedding  
Today I am grown familiar  
with my pain  
which no longer visits me disguised  
There exist not yet boundaries  
for recognition by foreigners  
but it has become precisely  
what it is  
Crawling inside the dream shaking  
machine madness of my own space  
I do not look outward  
and feel a rawness where the tear occurred  
I am no longer a queer adjunct  
to your ceremony

\* \* \*

When it started again  
no fearful child's dreams served as excuses  
no simplicity of octopuses - slimey and wet  
suffocating my small and fragile woman's body  
Reality told me clearly:  
I was no boy child--fearful--deserted  
and I am fearful of even my own hands  
touching my body kindly  
frigid

When I saw you not as often  
as others who have so heavily peopled my life  
why do I remember every line on your face, Maud  
I knew I could be there in that place  
                rocking myself  
                pacing  
My own kind asking that I stop crying  
The noise makes everyone sad



You were dead  
A letter written neatly  
ink on paper  
stamp put on straight in the right corner  
chit chat -- just news -- you were dead

Did you think you deserved it, Maud  
for the weakness you displayed  
at coping with a cruel life

When I am faced with night  
I think how you would say  
you were going to mass at 3 am  
pretending the night did not exist  
terrified  
perhaps as I am  
there will be no distractions, when everyone retires  
only the loneliness  
and terror  
the starkness of our madness  
the hours we must fight through

Maud, I wish you could answer me  
screaming  
out of those deep eye sockets  
can any of us live?

\* \* \*

Glancing in the rear view mirror  
going down a hill  
I see only clear sky behind me  
and for the quick glance of only one moment  
I felt the freedom of movement without the strings  
for only a moment -- just one moment  
there was nothing behind me  
I was only moving forward

The first few times I loved you  
in bed things just happened  
and after I couldn't remember  
who did what when  
I couldn't remember the order of events  
we were just touching each other  
and I felt surrendered without being compromised

Sometimes lately I feel everything  
in relationship to something else  
something earlier  
How I feel about you reminds me  
of the first woman I loved  
I live constantly glancing in the rear view mirror  
No hassles are new enough  
There is no problem that does not look familiar  
but I want to stay alive and I want to move

The other night  
glancing in the rear view mirror  
it was so dark I saw nothing  
It was only ahead I was going

\* \* \*



I had a dream of laying with someone  
I don't know the woman it was  
and we were being very gentle with each other  
but each finger tip touch across our bodies  
brought on immediate bruises  
of dark purple and blue

I cannot blot the vision from my mind  
the way I can't accept my relationships  
always hurting -- both of us  
And going carefully over every past  
that was really how it was  
wasn't it?  
No one came out unscarred  
neither of us were healed

I don't want to accept that as reality  
but at the same time I instinctively  
pull in my belt  
and decide in some distant hidden part of me  
not to feel anything for a while  
and the toughness I feel forced to be  
makes me feel so gay  
and reminds me of the lesbian I am  
cause I have always felt this  
when I felt alone  
and that seems all wrong  
to feel the need to deal with what I am  
more to the point  
to recognize and become more what I am  
alone  
That seems all wrong  
when what I am  
is because of what I love

But I have been here before  
the long sigh--rest up before you try  
again time  
The times my shoulders grow into my head  
from the hunching that becomes my  
stance against the world  
And I always start in again  
drinking a lot  
cause I am afraid to be alone  
but afraid too to be touched  
again so soon after  
and that is a narrow road to walk  
reaching out for companionship  
at the same time as blocking  
anything too close.

\* \* \*

She is too nice and not cool  
Her suffering shows like big pimples  
          someone didn't pick  
She is quick to hand it out  
          whatever the order might be  
and she does not always guess correctly  
          time, money, sympathy  
it is all offered indiscriminately  
She lays her cards on the table  
          all the time  
and we eat her up  
we devour her kindness  
thinking a card shown is to  
be taken advantage of

She is the only girl  
who wrote a poem to me  
that did not have a price tag  
and she leaves a record around  
just cause somebody is into it  
Her pockets are turned inside out  
and her lip is loose  
What hatred that can bring on  
while we bake in the warmth  
of her self sacrifice  
judging toughness by how cold  
someone can be to us without  
          actually being cruel

She lays out what she has  
          strength to defend  
No one enters battles  
they can't afford to lose  
and she can afford a lot  
She is a strong woman  
naked and trashy looking at  
those above her  
          straight in the eye  
          \* \* \*

This morning's heartbreak  
got in the way  
of all the things I find myself  
now wanting to do  
So instead of using the quiet time  
I needed for the thinking and production  
I sat at the edge of the bed  
listening to the pain between my breasts  
playing with the word you've left me  
fighting with the ache that's real  
begging on many different levels  
for the heartbreaks leaving  
and my own revival

\* \* \*



There are never waste baskets  
in the right places  
cleaning other peoples houses

Without thinking about it very much  
you stick their garbage in your pocket  
the garbage that's too big  
to be sucked in by the vacuum  
the crap that's too little but unsightly  
Cleaning other people's houses  
you know they want them to look clean  
without thinking about it very much

Sticking other people's garbage in my pocket  
is symbolic  
and I always intended to write a poem about it  
just like I always intend to clean my own house  
so it looks as nice as theirs  
I never do have the time though  
and I have found difficulty  
in locating my proper dwelling

Our lives are full of intrusions  
sensible and logical demands from  
a world of definitions that don't define us  
that don't tell me what it is  
this being a lesbian  
what one does  
being a lesbian  
The intrusions are always immediate  
and they take up all my time  
Even when I begin to feel  
the groping pains of self discovery  
I am interrupted and involved  
before I see the involvement  
for the interruption it really is  
Everybody and me too - I knew  
I really wasn't doing anything anyway  
Without thinking about it very much

Picking up the garbage cleans their rugs  
and dirties your pockets  
A friend of mine one time said  
she realized how unacceptable this life was  
but if it was charitable  
well, something for free is better than nothing  
but thinking about having to work so hard  
at surviving to live  
the way you don't want to live  
to begin with  
makes you at least contemplate  
not working at all

I am finally running scared  
and thinking very much  
about the things I do  
without thinking about them very much  
I don't want to die  
of constipation  
or with blue little tabs from  
pampers that were on other people's babies  
I do not want to die  
so full of their world  
I would rather even  
that I die a woman emptied

\* \* \*

Susan Baumtriger went to high school in Oxford  
Who knows? She might have been poor  
Who knows? You know?

Penny went to high school with her  
and Penny's poor  
Penny keeps her charm bracelet  
in a locked glass case  
and sells it to me for a quarter  
Susan -- she might have been poor  
or gay  
Who knows?

Susan died of leukemia  
Penny told me that  
"in high school", Penny said

J \_\_\_\_, neither of us cried  
we didn't hold each other  
She just told me  
Bad news always is matter of fact  
Who knows? Susan might have been poor  
or gay  
but she's dead for sure  
and Penny sold me her charm bracelet for a quarter

Life is full of pain for sure  
and Penny is poor for sure  
and for sure Susan is dead  
and without a doubt  
neither you or me want nothing  
nothing to be matter of fact anymore

So wear Susan Baumtriger's bracelet  
from the glass case  
for a quarter given to Penny  
who knew she died and told me  
and didn't touch me  
Wear it but lets swear nothing  
nothing is matter of fact  
no pain is just words  
there ain't nothing  
somebody doesn't deserve to answer for  
there ain't nothing says  
we women shouldn't live  
live alive  
Ain't nothing matter of fact  
Happy Birthday  
\* \* \*



## CONFLICT, THE SYMBOL OF CONTENTION

No symbol is necessary to know that conflict brings out the desire to contend and the rage we live with sometimes makes us believe we can win. We live with rage, we were bred in it and our neighborhood is isolated and unsafe. What surrounds us is mighty and pushes us closer, crowds us, uses us. So our rage becomes enriched but often out of control.

There are so many lines in this hexagram  
They are the roles people are living.

I am unsure of just who is who.

I do believe conflict in this arena is not productive and that the neighborhood is truly innocent of the transgressions that make it exist. I have always wanted to be a fighter minus the fear it gives me but the fourth nine undivided shows me unequal to the contention I seek. Following advice I will return to the ordinances and change my wish to contend and try to rest in being firm and seeking correctness.

They tell me there will be good fortune and I wish it for myself and my people. I hope however there will be a time when contention is possible collectively and not reckless--when it is recognizable what is correct--when rage will be equal to destroying all that evilly oppresses all the innocent neighborhoods.  
For now I will try and learn patience.

9-16-73 D.

*In the mean times  
In between times  
ain't they got fun?*

If you ever provoke a challenge  
to the politics of working-class dykes again,  
I will cut your heart out.

What is this shit?

Only the audacity of men can top your style.

When we disapprove of middle-class women,  
you blurt out your usual crap

of "Why are you staying in the group?"

"I mean, if your anger is so strong  
aren't you being hypocritical?"

"I mean, if you can't stand privileged women  
why don't you start an unprivileged group?"

You mean

If we don't like it, we can lump it,  
Love it or leave it.

And you persist even though  
working-class women have more right to the media,  
even though we outnumber you 2 to 1.

Since when did I say that  
my neck's struggle against your foot is over?  
Your strings on me are enough--  
Strings that I have more right to control  
means just that, so  
GET OFF MY ASS.

Need is equivalent to right  
and this "equals" fuckery has got to go.  
Your grossness is basically ownership--  
you are confident of it, always have been--  
And you think it applies to women  
like me and like others  
not like you.  
I ONLY HOPE TO REPAY YOU SOMEDAY.

*There's nothing surer...*

9-17-73  
poem to C.

How come you are so fucking important  
to my political (therefore, entire) well-being,  
and we are getting fucked around  
on the "unequal love" trip  
and there isn't even some oink to blame?

I can barely remember our spontaneity, comfort  
and 100%-on-the-ball-or-pretty-damned-closeness.  
Now we don't hardly speak respect to each other  
or even be ridiculous and jive-assed.

It's no fun anymore.  
This sexual complexity is ruining our act.  
There has to be a better way because  
Production Will Suffer--  
and I'm tired of that.

I know we make a lot of sense and trouble,  
And that's the make I'm on the most.  
SO CALL ME UP AND READ ME THE DICTIONARY  
DO IT WITH CYMBALS AND IN 4/4 TIME  
I'm sure I could pick up the tune,  
It should be easy to dance to and, yes,  
I'll probably buy this record.  
\* \* \*

9-17-73

I have a definite bend toward violent behavior.  
Talks of physical confrontation work me up  
and missing a good fight  
is my bitterest frustration  
more than sex, more than drugs,  
more than money--  
though I generally feel passive  
and in touch with some satisfaction,  
even though my fear is significant,  
I know my anger scares some women  
and I scare myself from time to time.

It doesn't really upset me,  
lots of women should not cross me  
the ways that they do.  
I find a definite conflict with  
some middle-class women's hesitancy to react  
violently against middle-class women's bullshit.  
Aren't they glad they use dial?  
Don't they wish everybody did?  
\* \* \*



9-20-73

SPEAKING OF BEING HOT

Hot-assed,  
Hot-blooded,  
Not to be dismissed.  
She is hot, isn't she?  
All that sexist shit is fire  
On both sides of the door.  
Hot enough to thrive and survive  
By every taste of making it to one more day.  
Hot enough to return the blow,  
Hot enough to sting.  
Hot stuff.  
Hot shit.  
A very hot item.  
A hot enough item to repeat as needed,  
according to prescription for the pain  
Of feeling hot,  
And definitely bothered.  
Hot to the touch from pressure-cooking.  
Being bound and unable to burn.  
Too hot from being too handled--  
And determined to boil  
Whether she's watched or not.

\* \* \*

9-24-73

I should follow my own advice.  
I always lean toward confrontation  
when advising women on their affairs.  
I almost always say: deal with it--  
bite in and find out  
just what the fuck is going on.

I can reason and argue about  
the uselessness of guilt, paranoia and self-hatred  
up the ass.  
But when it comes to my own affairs  
I'm begging to be committed.

I can say: ask for the truth;  
it's the right thing to do  
and it frequently pays off.  
I can say: pursue, stand up for yourselves  
and don't eat shit.  
But I stick my head and my heart in the sand,  
wishing for someone to notice my tail feathers  
and treat me right  
tell me what I want to hear  
and let me feign innocence and ignorance  
if I wind up with fool's gold  
or an empty pan.

\* \* \*

2-11-74

B.B. What you said yesterday to those people  
didn't sound like NO to me.

What can I do or say  
when I can't understand you  
and I can't ask or shouldn't?  
I know I'm scared of you sometimes  
like others are scared of both of us sometimes  
and as I'm sure I scare you sometimes-  
and when enough factors are clear  
I try to ask  
But in such serious times  
with such serious feelings  
and the fear of loss, separation and pain,  
no understanding cannot be permanent,  
shouldn't be-  
But it could be terminal  
\* \* \* \* \*

We are being preyed on  
and must fight to live and support our fight.  
I will support you- you know that  
I will support us all until that  
should change-  
We have learned the importance of that  
and my concern and anger  
is in that the seriousness of our struggles  
and needs will not be borne out  
and last past the mistakes and weaknesses.

I have been parented in this community  
by the self-righteousness and competition  
of others  
and by my own guilt and I HATED IT.  
but I have learned alot  
that is valuable from women  
who were important to me,  
who had stuff to say  
who struggled with me, I with them  
and many of us together.

I have shuffled under certain words  
because those words were oinkings.  
But many words; given as truth/ expecting truth;  
AND GIVING A GODDAM ABOUT ME  
EXPECTING A GODDAM BACK  
are what I remember and use,  
and know were right  
more often than wrong.  
The times I haven't felt good  
about it have always been clear.  
That is, not feeling good  
has not been an illusion,  
and that's what guts are made of.  
\* \* \*



12-11-73

I want to make slow and deliberate love to you.  
I want to support your body and rock you  
stroke you firmly like a curing massage  
to get all of your nerves cooled out  
as they should be, at some times,  
for re-weaving, nourishment and rest.  
I want to lay back all the clenching,  
all the fears that make you sleep with a knife,  
for a temporary exercise in very heavy purring.  
That's all, I think.

\* \* \*

2-18-74

The last day, the last word.

No more. 100%.

No more.

No more guts, no more cards on the table  
without full participation.

No more truth against timidity and no truth.

No more one-way struggle.

No more support out of seriousness

for the carelessness that's so unnecessary.

No more because it drags me down to levels

I fought to get out of.

No more caring on such a transient basis.

No more no more no more

no more involuntary living.

No more slip-shod nothing.

NO MORE trusting and believing

in what I'm seldom told

and seldomer see, these days.

\* \* \*

2-18-74

Why can't I harness this life  
Why can't I change the schizophrenia  
and why do I ask myself questions  
that have been answered in so many ways.  
(: Because of definite plans to mix us around  
and keep us in doubt enough to live  
harmless lives hurting ourselves.)  
\* \* \*

2-18-74

The heat of my tears  
and the heat of my anger  
force me and my life  
to quicker decisions--  
quicker than my face and soul  
can resist the burn sometimes  
so I scar and scar  
and my skin gets tight  
like the skin on a woman's chest  
with one breast removed  
so she can't raise her arm  
in objection, or defense of words  
or even to save her life.  
(A radical mastectomy does not have to  
hinder one's index finger.)  
\* \* \*



2-19-74

Sometimes I feel like Maude  
with her hard line pursed lipped cold  
attack on life and its occupants.

sometimes I don't think I can absorb  
anymore pain, not one more ice treatment,  
not one more bit of ridicule, not one more lie.

Grandma, you bitch, they called you blister  
and everybody just thought  
you just wanted to bitch--  
as if you have nothing to bitch about.

\* \* \*

2-19-74

Did I imagine it?  
Did I misunderstand your affection?  
Am I misunderstanding your ice?  
Did you get too loose for someone else's comfort?  
Did I? (No, loose is not what I got, unfortunately.)  
I don't know--

It could be a business influence  
and I can dig that.

But I never did like silent movies.

All I can see now is the back of your head  
and if I ask you to turn around, will you?  
Or will you have to check with someone else?  
Will I work up the courage to ask?

\* \* \*

2-22-74

What I want is no illusions--  
and I have no illusions that sometimes  
I have been looking in the mirror.  
That is not to say that I haven't sometimes  
liked what I've seen.

3-1-74

#### AFTER PICKING UP THE PIECES

sometimes I feel so incredibly weak  
and intolerant (and guilty for it)  
And I want to kick my own ass  
to keep myself from fucking up  
and whimping out  
Because I think it's the right thing to do.

When women I love get shakey  
my reflex (unless they're putting  
a bad hurt on me, or if I think  
they're whimping out bad,)  
is to comfort them,  
hold them and rub them--  
put them back together if I can  
and hope that if it's me hassling them  
that I will see it and stop it if I should.

Now, there is some contradiction there--  
and I don't know if it's my guilt or what.  
But, I'm learning that bottling my fears  
only induces fermentation  
and that my stiff upper lip and dry eye  
is bullshit when it hides my soggy limp soul.

\* \* \*



3-1-74

I'M NOT COLD--I'VE BEEN FROZEN  
I'M NOT HARD--I'VE BEEN CALLUSSED

#### SHOCKING ME

flashing zany crazy shakey nervous manic speeding  
like an electric wire, worn thin  
worn out from being walked on under a rug  
being jangled stretched jerked  
like an over-extended cord  
prongs bent from being uprooted rudely.

If I break,  
even though my current is low  
and I'm missing some circuits,  
I'll fly and spark and firework  
(unless somebody throws the master switch & I'm spent)  
and maybe electrocute somebody,  
burn a house down, who knows.

All of us know that when an electric current  
meets water it spreads as far as the same  
water can flow fly spray  
run as deep as the levels vailable  
be pumped into any body  
it can penetrate

\* \* \*

#### EARLY AWAKENING

Awake at dawn  
I stretched and yawned,  
caressed by last night's petal bed,  
your warmth too near  
to sleep again.

Instead I watched the sunshine  
slowly sifting  
thru coarse brown weave,  
sprinkling its light  
on your dark woman shape.

But fully arrived  
the daytime  
gripped my reverie  
with thoughts of arid paper sea,  
the long, dull hours ahead,  
and fear of the end  
wrapped poison  
around our gentle beginning.

\* \* \*

ON BECOMING A DEDICATED PUBLIC SERVANT

With midnight splash in bursting brook  
my barren head sought nurture for  
New Dreams.

Morning found it placed again  
among machines,  
terrified  
the dream would fade before the day  
and crazed with thirst  
I'd see fountains gush  
from this dead sea of paper.

\* \* \*

THE LAST REVOLUTION

When lovers can love  
and not fear the end,  
my friend said,  
the last revolution  
will have been won.

\* \* \*



TO THE DIRECTOR

I've done courting death,  
stalking love  
with my life  
in this sulfurous place.

I feed instead  
on shadows of passion,  
cruel hints  
of flames I'll never know.

It's not quite the banquet  
I once had in mind,  
yet fuel enough  
to find

and pulverize  
the rotten cold fish  
who's fouled the air.

\* \* \*

Your destiny is  
unselfconscious,  
a dark and heavy nightmare  
you've handled and spoken all your life.  
You know yourself  
because you know your pain.

Mine has been a blurry sketch  
lacking substance  
to anchor it down,  
empty of women loved,  
forgone  
or denied,  
full of nameless lies.

With closer knowledge of desire  
thirty-five years dead,  
ugly, real, and heavy inks  
flow into my emptiness.

\* \* \*

Crawling free from diseased non-life  
with men and motherhood,  
becoming the child I should always have been,  
it seemed I'd shed my false beginning.  
It hurts to be young when I'm so old, I said,  
but at least it feels clean and fresh.

Yesterday I saw my childhood disease  
recoil against women I love  
and knew it had always recoiled  
against women I might have loved.

How foolish I was to think my life had no continuity.

#### TO MY DAUGHTERS

Preparing to walk away  
my arms are aching  
to protect you  
even as I know  
wrapped around you  
they're a growing plant  
that clings and winds  
and strangles us all.

Preparing to walk away  
my eyes are stinging  
with regretful tears  
remembering how often  
you listened bewildered  
to tales I read to myself  
just so I'd stay home  
even as I know  
your eyes already  
look beyond me  
forgetful  
of the years you stole.

Preparing to walk away  
my body is throbbing  
with imperious need  
to fill in time  
the gaping hole  
a fifteen-year mistake  
left me  
burning with anger  
that you walk away  
so whole and beautiful.

Forgive me for that anger.  
Forgive me for not knowing how to put  
your anger  
into this poem.

Forgive me for asking forgiveness  
instead of leaving years ago.

\* \* \*



A lot of women have  
    made  
    me  
    cantaloupe  
in the cool of  
wild summer mornings  
and with some I have  
    exchanged  
    myself  
    regularly  
for the permanent memory  
of apricots.

I have learned to accept  
love as I give it:  
    plum  
    passion  
eaten from the center out  
and lately  
I've been on good hands.

\* \* \*

#### BLOOD SHAMPOO

Sometimes when rainbow drinkers  
give up commercial magic  
I want a poem  
in my fingers  
so bad  
that when your read it  
you feel like I'm massaging your head  
with my very own blood shampoo.

\* \* \*

## WALKING IN AND WALKING OUT

are not what they used to be.  
Oh, once in a while I crack at a roomful of eyes  
trying to dis-integrate me  
as though their amazed stares blew me apart  
everytime I became the object  
of curiosity ridicule obscenity or threat  
that bearing myself  
an uppity dyke  
provoked.

I can no longer be counted on to fragment inside  
everytime some pimp says loudly to his friends  
"Honest to god. I can't tell."  
It's no accident that I create confusion by existing  
I suppose they think  
I should have the decency to be abashed.  
They certainly tried.

Anyway, walking in and walking out  
are changing for me now.  
The eyes are always there  
and the apparently innocent  
phrases that break  
through survival deafness  
leaving no doubt that  
a group's dangerous laughter is for me  
but occasionally--still rarely--  
I can make it a little less killing to be  
in public.

I study the faeces that are watching me  
and I let the poisons their gazes soak me in  
seep out of the skin  
that once ached  
from so much looking at it  
and I mark time with my breath  
swelling in my chest, thinking,

It's not tonight I whiten your sockets  
while you gawk over a coffee  
or pull out your retina before the movie starts  
or squash your looking fluids on the bus  
It's not tonight  
and it's not soon enough  
but it is soon.

\* \* \*



TWO DYKES, UGLY BY TRADITIONAL STANDARDS

huddle together after staying death for the day.  
The white one whose bigness makes her look soft  
holds the head of the beige one  
whose drag makes her look hard.  
They rock each other to stay awake  
to stay asleep to stay alive  
exchanging softness and hardness  
making themselves beautiful and strong  
against death every day  
Disfigured a little, perhaps,  
by the small gun  
beating against their mutual breast.

\* \* \*

REQUIEM

I live on a border.  
After a day at work in one country  
speaking a strange language  
behaving an alien culture  
if a movie on my own time is more of the same  
if a bar or music is more of the same  
if the streets and the people in them  
are more of the same  
I eat alone in my room  
and try to clean up what the day has done to me.

Sometimes I am forced  
to shut down everything around me  
the weather, the neighbors, the shades,  
the nerve endings, the heart, the others,  
until I've eaten the warmed over death.

I shut down everything in my country  
and sometimes I don't come out for years  
and sometimes I don't come out at all  
and sometimes I come out vomiting all over  
myself--to be sure--  
but I live in such a small country  
that puke which turns everything into itself  
spills inevitably past the border  
and They choke on it,  
but I don't  
because mourning sickness  
is a staple in my country.

\* \* \*

How do you locate  
the warps in a mirror

Looking at yourself  
seeing is believing  
you've seen yourself  
reflected from a few angles,  
a few faces,  
what did you see in them  
something of your own,  
something you found  
in the mirror, and were afraid you'd  
forgotten it before,  
having seen your reflection  
a hundred times

But now you reflect  
there is always distortion  
you lose in translation  
(you always knew that)  
and hurt from illusion  
and ache for the truth

You find you are still for real,  
but distortion makes a lie of the image  
the warps stand out  
the mirror is cracked  
in a crazed pattern.

\* \* \*



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