WOMEN &LOVE





a special issue NUMBER SEVEN



#### **SECOND SERIES, #7**

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IKON is published by IKON Inc., P.O. Box 1355, Stuyvesant Station, New York, N.Y. 10009. Subscription rates: \$10.00 for two issues; Institutions \$15. Single copy \$6. All manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Copyright ©1987 IKON Inc. All Rights Reserved. On publication all rights revert to authors. Please contact them directly for permissions to reprint. Spring/Summer 1987. ISSN #0579-4315

Printed in the United States by Wickersham Printers, 2959 Old Tree Drive, Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603-4080. Typesetting by Michael Sykes/Archetype West, P.O. Box 516, Point Reyes Station, California 94956.

This publication is made possible, in part, with public funds from the NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS.

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## Hilda Morley

#### **TIDE**

Under the pine-trees pine-needles

the blue jays

call loudly

The mat of pine-cones

has a heavy smell

I wade in puddles

of sunlight where before it was shadowy

between the branches

There are taller

lights among the trees now

The bird-cries

are more questioning

I wished you there

your brown neck

in the sunlight those birds

in rapid conversation

over us the fall of your hair.

What turn

now?

What shift into

(a bewilderment

the waters gathering to their full

as the moon,

the moon draws them,

contracts

and widens

Through this hole

now in the universe

this pain

unexpected

These currents

Will the moon-curve

balance them

in its further

reckoning?

Will the light

intaken

take refuge again in those eyes exhaling

a darkness



## The Doorway

There are different kinds of discourse

How do I know what I mean when I speak of "you" is impossible to say.

or when I write out the words "you are in my mind" what exactly am I saying?

Where is it I think you are, or the image of you

that I say "I carry"
Like the white basket on my arm that is generally filled with the objects
I need?

Or like a sheet of paper with your name written on it?

Or a stick of the kindling to add to the smouldering fire here.

which seems about to go out

if I fail to poke it?

When I say that I think of

you, am I saying

that you are always to be

found on a page of my thoughts

if I turn the leaves

over

at the same place always?

Should I believe when I'm made

uneasy

about the shape of the doorway you mention that making it taller would relieve me?

#### The Globe

A plastic globe of the world

about 3 inches

in circumference

sits near my bed,

I've never told you

how in this last summer

I measured distances on it

with my fingers-

how far my letter

to you would travel, how long it would take for my words to reach you

(I've never told you)

feeling the curve of the globe from point to point: America to Europe,

Europe

to India, the rises & the falls
of the earth's surface, mountains
& crevasses, seas & plains in the heat of
summer

rising to the tiny line where my words might find you:

ink shaped into speaking, loops

of my hand's intention—

the fingers'

reach, to touch you there.

in that thinner air



#### THE CUSP OF FEELING

"You're the find of my life; I know it sounds corny but I love you"—

—through the room of boxes and the half-ajar door which shuts off cats and yearnings listing smoothly on the cool night air making solid the reasons why there is this wall through the common space of kitchen where we say goodnight and speak next morning in the definite tones of light (note: in this poem—as in real life—your bedroom is a mine field, uneasy ground left better unexplored)

you lie there
unconscious (conscious?) of this moorless thread
unwinding in my chest—
later take your place beside me
in a sleeping bag upon the floor:
one hazy moment of clear communication,
a touch as fugitive as the hug we use
to greet and say goodbye:
"I'm writing a poem," I answer—
talking to you like always
in the silences of things
I want to say—
to say that I have room here for you
in the cusp of feeling
rising between my breasts



#### A JAZZ POEM

for Michele\*

Lie low-

and love

This is the season

for silence
and deep feeling
no questions or threats
promises or open compromises
togetherness built on
nothing but need
quick, sharp
blood knowing how to seek
its own salvation

But such abstractions scatter
this muted moonlight
clichéd beauty of a lone
coconut tree
giving shape to the silver sky:
the only definition one can trust—
a fact
as true as hummingbird flight
the arch of a lithe brown body
clotted pain whimpering in boxes—
(nobody knows
what it's all about)

This old world is not civilized
Grace plays no violins
Drums beat
some other rhythm
Maniac cowboys
riding herd
over rock/dark people,
refusing the staged stampede
resisting the old orders

As usual this poem wants to hide its hand its origins in your shoulder, your clear-eyed images of heart and struggle As usual
I want to hush my mouth
and become a universal voice
chanting down Babylon
in broad accents of the people

But what I really want is for this thumping in my chest to break clean through

I want to become myself

I want the stolen spirits to gather at night and teach me another language

But I'm afraid if I start talking, I may not stop for another hundred years

\* To be read/heard to the music of Archie Shepp and Dollar Brand.

#### WE LOVE IN CIRCLES

we love in circles touching round—

faces in a ritual ring
echoing blood and color:
nappy girlheads in a summer porch swing
belligerent decisions to live
and be ourselves

first within, then out of the bands which grow too tight gold multiplying lovers costing us dear

serious commitments to own, to other to chaos and the maelstrom winding deep swirling sunspots blinding like the first real kiss in a room of strangers

voices a refrain:

Their marriage has lasted five years now (the community helps keep them together)

I'm committed to non-monogamy, one woman said Then she (non-monogamy, not the women) became the new girl on the block

A comes before B—now you remember that Mother Kettle says—
But also C D E F G J K and Y,
I caught up in the middle courting doom

we become one crazy geographic crazy quilt: Washington, D.C. and New York City a two-sided circle return trips rounding it out roping in Philly and Boston Cleveland and the Coast ringing the world—
a daisy chain of legs and mattress edges

looping

we love in circles
passing it on—
palm up turned down, palm up turned down,
palm up turned down, palm up turned down...
passing it on—
all the strength
the knowledge of honeyed yams and dirty rice
caring—fragile and constant

caring—fragile and constant connections how to write a story how to live our story how to make our lives:

one dazzling orb

GLORIA HULL

## gale jackson

## selections: the precision of the embrace

## translations.

"salud"

"health"

"and money" she's feeling herself tonite but she's watching him weary, too hard to be close like this and not close. you know, cool.

"everybody's serving time, one way or another" he said, picking up our conversation just where we had left off when the waiter came. "nay" i says to keep the conversation flowing.

"hey that's good, how long you said she's been here?" he's asking her, that's a concession to her territory and you know how men are, but she's not using it so he answers himself: "two days, wonderful. keep that up and you'll be talking like a native in no time."

"nay" i says

he roars. rearing back in his chair with laughter. he tips but he don't fall which would be funny though cause he's a big guy.

the taverna meglau in hellenica. the menu is in greek. the waiters. the liquor list and the prices. no translations. no touristas. no people, 'cept us, from the base.

"logarisis mou paracalo" he says and the waiter begins to tally it up. the meal has been a feast. his treat. greek style. the big black man with the very white smile has known more greek women then i have known women, has seen the sun rise over mount ida every day for the past eight years. we will take over his house. he gleefully orients us.

"how do you say girlfriend?"

"boyfriend is felos."

<sup>&</sup>quot;no, oshe, thelo 'girlfriend'"

again, the festive lion, he roars; his mouth like a pink tunnel lined with piano keys and strung with chords. he's laughing and laughing while she and i sit patiently waiting, the perfect dinner couple. who do you think thinks i'm really her cousin. but uncle sam is dumb. from the inside 'the war' could scare you to death.

"and how do you say happy?"

he won't tell. "curses?"

oh yes. his lips burst open with a gay perversity. "but this gesture" he shows us "says everything . . . thou who commits adultery with your mother's mother, thou who sucks a mule's dick, thou with breath like scum . . ." he can not stop laughing. she smiles.

the waiter brings more wine.

the taverna meglau in hellenica. it buzzes in my ears like sing song and bazookie music. i am speaking without connectors: knowing only nouns and verbs. the black man. ordering, fluent, is also an american despite the sculpted markings that identify us as africans once and always. he's fun loving and only vaguely, ritually commercial (like he probably brush with pepsodent). the taverna is a streetside roped off from the limitless speed of cars rushing by. the street is a temple; curvacious, doomed, womanish. her eyes across the table and catch a look to set the nite on i fold my hands in my lap. fire. look down. this table she is too sensual. the loose clothing, the secrets, this new place excites me. and her sex. but we keep a wall of silence for these others.

looking up from my drink i catch his eye catching mine catching hers. i don't give a damn. he's giddy with freedom drunk with wine drinking to the end of his personal war with the american government. back to the world now. he leaves whatever life that has accumulated here for him as tho it be only a matter of lost or borrowed time. back to the world, going home after a ten year duty tour. "here is to the world." our glasses click over the room filled with food and talk and probably lots of lovers waiting for a more auspicious hour; for the nite to stop throbbing.

"salud" she says.

we drink, swallowing to the sounds of knife and fork against plates & against themselves. and then in a teeny tiny voice i ask:

"how do you say pussy?"
she holds her glass mid motion.
"what?" he shouts above the din.
and so a
little louder but still teeny tiny i say "pussy"

he now cannot help himself from falling from the chair. big say little say deep say wide say wet. he is laughing from the floor. anyway you want to say it. sav it. even the waiter chuckles shoulders and throat. other diners give friendly nods then turn back to their business at hand. friend is their friend and there are no strangers here where the language is its own. our friend is a fountain of laughter; a magnificent gevser from the taverna floor. i throw my arms around her high on his exhilaration. fearing no evil, feeling first nite out in our new home and when she touches no pain. me back smiling i feel every muscle in my body sigh.

## clove and challdice.

rise sally rise.

how body becomes home; becomes firm as floors and foundations to sunlite wakes her. the loud silence overcomes her dreams. city dreams. in a cab she sits locusts thump. the old mule brays. a rooster up. chickens, sweeping the dirt yard with their fitful wings, scatter. the sea repeats and repeats its monotone. the mysterious thing that lives between the ceiling and roof scurries back and forth over her head. the clock and rises, hesitant, to close the shutters the other woman had opened to the nite. challdice, she thought to herself, was afraid of the dark.

body. home. floor. shutters. she stands looking back at sleep's knotted arms. then she goes to the kitchen to warm black bread and to make tea; one sweet, one without both dark and strong and pungent.

outside the window locusts are devouring the petunia tree by covering it with their bodies and eating and eating until one, its belly full, might drop to the earth and another take its hand suspended on the shutters she watches them. remembering how they came flying in like a dark cloud on july's from habit she looks towards the eastern sky. anticipating the next sounds. the roar of engines fill her waiting and from the shadow of the sun reconaissance planes drone into sight. morning maneuvers. like one large angry bird. three planes chart a steep ascent and then, whipping at the western clouds, turn quickly and in unison back towards the she draws back the shutters. the dogs whimper behind base. her and, to let challdice sleep, she hurries to fill their pan. steps out into a wet morning. the sunlight she spits. the dogs are eating a rabbit between brilliant.

them and their mouths are bloody and thick with fur. challdice gives them water, the house gives them porch shade. the other americans have named them lady and fred but they are wild dogs. they run in brambles. they hunt their prey for food.

"nayah, dio, thria, thresera, pendi, exey, epti, octo....."
"baby!" she calls back "baby!" she laughs a little nervous, concerned, coming barefoot quiet thru the hallway so as not to startle the sleeptalking awake.

"ndecka, thodecka, deckathria..."

"baby" she says finally, softly, gently reaching to wake challdice who is nested in the blankets, the wool, the fokati, even in this summer's heat. "wake up chad . . ." she paused, in her eyes the twisted mouth "wake up chad you talkin' in your sleep."

she jumps up brite eyed and wild. hair standin' up. i was counting it back"

"it's ok chad it's really ok." she gathers her up in her arms, all of it; the girl, the pillows, the blankets, the dreams, the books, the pencils, the masses of hair. "hush. hush. no wonder you have bad dreams with all this shit in the bed with you." "i was counting it back. there was too many people killed. we couldn't get out..."

"hush."

"we couldn't get out. it was all on fire. i was looking for you. we was trapped on the wrong side and i was looking for you and i was counting it back like dorothy going back to kansas after oz."

"baby" she laughed now, a teasing laugh "baby come on" "aint no after oz wife"

"hhhush!"

"i'm losing it. these dreams" she shakes her head. she tightens her arms around her. "it's ok chad it's ok just hold me, just hold on."

how body becomes home how hand becomes direction how tired limbs embrace. roosters crow. chickens scatter. mule brays. sheep bleat. locust thump. corn whispers. locusts feed. planes dot the sky. the women embrace.

## black in white.

we are dressed in white. our skin black. very black from sun for breakfast for lunch. sunset is a god's brightly we've some now from invisible eve dancing on wine glasses. the sea, for dinner. she drinks. an absolutely brown liquor. she smokes and beyond her the waiter is coming with bowls of fruit nestled in the crook of his brown arm, an inexpensive feast, an impatient look. he drops the bread before her but her grace is unshakable. she outs the cigarette with her sandal there are four drack, a fist full of fist full, in her dusty pants pocket. only i know how broke we really are.

he begins to yell. i translate under his voice.
"he says that we have to spend more money. he remembers us. he's talking about his mother-in-law and all the pecillos, listen babe i think we better walk."

"it's cool" she says "order squid."

he quiets for a moment realizing that we have, between us, worked something out. "fellie mou thelo calamari para calo" having heard all that he needed the large man returns to the kitchen.

we are sitting at the streetside. the taverna is nothing more than a store front kitchen. there are five tables in the fenced off vard. the people next to us, surely greeks, are eating of the brains of some animal. laughing. young men in cut off slacks are arguing wildly. much gesturing of the arms, across the street. throwing stones or racing among the stores which are their homes the brilliant displays which are their yards. there are no touristas here but just around the corner, everywhere they are shopping. else. eating. drinking. it is july.

i begin to eat slowly, bread and saziki watermelon and cherries spitting seeds and pits into the street. she's rolled up her pants and we carry on a lazy but lurid conversation in greek just because most of the words we know pertain to sex and lovemaking. the air is arid. flies lite in and out of the tables.

a waiter across the street springs to life. "casthrophia!" a jug of blood red wine, toppled, his thin brown arms wavering for a moment thru air, across his face in horror, seven south afrikans red with sunburn become animated in wine dark chatter. with the towel still hanging over his arm of two graceful brush strokes, he runs across the street toward us.

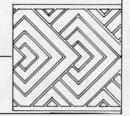
she needs no time to take her clue, to make her move, the two drack on the table, my wrist, we fly. racing into the street. into and around every possible obstacle, market cart, donkey, dodging among parked tractors and motorbikes and then along the seaside alley way that lets out into a field of wheaten grass that rises, and we hide, face down breasts panting. alley the waiter calls our mothers every possible variation on obscenity every brand of whore that ever cursed god's noble earth with her foul feet her stink pussy and on and on in a greek without need of translation. and then he was gone. angry because we had eaten and left, him, one nite without such was the state of our hungers, the state of our material wealth. but we're in love. young. learned, yet, the value of tears.

the ancient warrior nestor, it is said, though mortal seemed somehow to possess some great wisdom of life. and though he had fought many wars and sailed many seas and loved many loves and hated with a ferocity and shortlivedness that was only rivaled by the gods themselves, nestor in his old age seemed to lay hold on only one material possession of those riches he had accumulated in life in love and war and that was a golden cup ornamented with the figures of two birds feeding.

when we rise from the grasses my shapeless dress billows toward her as the church bells begin to peal themselves over the alleyways and fields and in silence, in the silence of comrades and co-conspirators we take hands and walk slowly towards the road.

beside us the sea. the sails. we are dressed in white. white capped ocean. white clouds. black sun and arms and faces. coritzi mou. she smiles with a pirates gap tooth lost in a bar brawl. we veer off towards the boats. we run. the sea comes to the sand. we're there.

## <u>AUTUMN SESTINA</u> DONNA DECKER



The sun beams patterns through the shades of the living-room. I turn my head to smell the cider and ratatouille cooking. My cup is empty. This is new for me, the light of morning, watching the trees drop their apples, watching the slow turning, firing of the leaves.

I get up, collect the dishes and leave the living-room. At each window hang bamboo shades. The sun is having a party, bouncing through the appletree, squeezing through window cracks. "It smells like Spring," I think and watch the light explode in the yard. I pick up my cup.

I remember when I was a child, my grandfather's cup was twice the size of mine. He would leave sometimes in the middle of the night, or when the light was coming through the white shades to steer his tugs. Smells of tar, grease, bacon, apple-

pie release him to me, applecheeked Grandpa. He'd drink cups of mineral water at dinner, while steak smells filtered through the house. We'd leave to walk our dog Cindy. Shades of summer embracing us, the light

wavering, the breeze hugging us lightly on our mile walks, picking apples, we sauntered over the bridge. We'd shade our hands over our eyes and stare at the sun. Cups of tea awaited us home. Grandma'd leave them for us. Smelling

her cookies drew us; her powder-smell enveloped us, while light as a bird she hopped through the house, drawing shades, plumping pillows, humming. Our cups washed, draining in the sink we'd leave the kitchen with its bed-time smells.

Grandpa, every night I pull the shade, kiss your cup, smell Grandma, fresh as apples.
You leave when I turn out the light.

## Lovepoem With Dracena— Marginata Blooming

Didn't I know it cld be this way

dracena improbably blooming only

after love spilt the way of all

such

bloomings

off the stalk the bed the table
the hand the breast the face the talk the hillside
into a gutter the woman who stole my husband
screams at my teenage son insulting him for having been born
with a genetic defect such

as she is. . . .

O the long arching branch inebriated with its own starry,sweet scented blooms redefines apartment heated with fossil

fuel a life only partially re-invented after the jewel,didn't I know it cld be this way,not in the flowering burst but in the going on

stained with negative emotion

.... we gather branches loaded with o improbable love

"grace to be born and to live. . . ."

and what did her nibs Sappho gather from the yng women who gathered to hear her teaching on syntax

chromatic scales of sunflower,hyacinth, peridot flash where ocean is a wild herd of wild horses

. . . when she was 8 my daughter confided to me that she would grow up to be a wild mustang stallion. . . .

Ed Sanders laughed & blushed when I said to Rochelle "we are Sappho's reincarnate women"



.... memory of a soldier's ashen spear tucked below tightly knotted belly muscle curld branch whose sap is fluid information

literal/littoral

bloodroot suddenly expanding a river's side including mindless chatter of insects blowing out of the weedy grasses

Didn't I know it cld be this way

So much blossoming, so much emptiness I fall I fall from the cliff of my bones fragile as a flower or call I call from deep within though the spirits who answer only narrow the measure, inoculate me with Black & wonderful Egypt: those women who more than understood the wide grave lifting the black milk of grief into nurture substance, their breath a glyph still untranslated

Oh the spirits who answer only narrow the measure I fall I call I walk to the river incorporating the improbable world around me it blossoms, blossoms relentlessly perfectly whole

I would wrap the river's belt of shine around my waist evaporate, rise up to be a cloud kissing moon evaporate & fall again to earth as rain

call me mother it is not needed to call me poet

#### BARBARA MORAFF

## Here Where We Are

We celebrate ending of another winter with cold chablis with language that reflects bluer skies & the petit-point of rain silver-stippling lawns' fields' brown toward green rush.

We walk waterblack streets

crocus & English daffodils thrusting at edges of stone walls & houses.

Something here is separate. Something with its own urge to vigil underground awakens,

announces, stalkly, its green purple yellow white philosophy.

Birds return. Spatter our plastic rainhats.

Somewhere a glass shatters a door slams a child who has difficulty breathing smiles a kiss to his parents Somewhere a poet falls & breaks footbones.

O this forest. There are many gates & none locked or locked to the eyes whose vision demands accommodation.

We've gone

back to the land, the sacred mud, the slime, the silt, the roxk,the flowing earth(light and what generates liaht water and what generates water fire and what generates fire air and what generates air) astrologers sift this for starlight's influence: this one will commit no atrocity, this one no error, this one no love, this one no grey neutrality, this one no prejudice, this one will join other ones, this woman bears only sorrow and this one only song no flesh of her flesh (O Sappho!)survive.

In my dream I recognize that I am dreaming. I watch my breath.

One moment dreaming next awake, That's how (Peter Blue Cloud)it goes.

## Barbara Moraff

In darkness I rise & wash & tend the fires

Truth bitch.

. . . . driving through the shopping mall looking for a parking space suddenly three yng teens parade in front of car I had to shortstop. . . called through open window Hey Ladies that's not TOO COOL and in one voice they said IMAGINE

there's nothing wrong with the times/poetry is everywhere though at times discursive, dangerous to itself

. . . . you breathe out knowing as you breathe out there is nothing at the end of that breath

to do

The secret tantric teachings: there is nothing to do so do it with profoundly confident energy

There is a river in whose depths surreal images are stored & one by one by a process unknown to us they materialize in the mother's womb

to insure the survival of death

to be born / all time is beginningless

there is a red thread connnecting us spiritual umbilicus a white one also not the silver wrist-flinging of western alchemy

it is deeper (this) than aura

we peel out from our mother's flesh bawling we bawl/ball all through our lives cowed

by starlight

Cowed by starlight Knowing remembering

places we could not possibly have been to in this form of consciousness

how trust

ourselves

& we don't understand these configurations these bodies we live inside of & move

as we are

movd

O this forest there are many gates & none locked

In death mind drifts like a feather In life mind drifts like a feather

until we invent ourselves in spite of ourselves

Appearances coalesce in the point of unity the union of bliss & emptiness (emptiness of bliss!) Death's brilliantly mirrored ineradicable signature whose poetry sounds in all the kitchens gardens barns cities of the world

moved by the power ( ) which is not

our individual power

thus it is true.

We celebrate beginning of a season. We celebrate being ourselves.

We who have a self yet have no self.

Moved by the power our individual power.

which is not

Thus it is true.

My independent,teenage daughter tells me mother, you smell like a mother. You exude earth odor & it shines in my mind. Thank you

for being my mother. I also give thanks.

### MOON

whose pressure

light touch

lifts

the mind of things

the hidden mountain

**BARBARA MORAFF** 



debraj.vetterman drawings









Here I am, not working. Batya says: "How does it feel to be a kid?" But this is better. This is Manhattan. My room

is a small sanctuary:
"Mikdosh m'at."
Sheba the Cat dozes on my shell-pink spread, left ear poised while

Batya stretches in the doorway like a feline who won't eat meat or kill a fly. She joins "Cat lovers against the bomb,"

paints shadows on the sidewalk: children walking their dogs, women holding hands, men crossing against the light.

The summer I sleep here, New York is a city of white shadows. At first, I walk around them. In time, I learn to say their names.

#### 2. 6th Floor

We open all windows from the top, not the bottom, so Sheba won't fall out. That means anything can fly in.

For example, this spider on my arm. Batya says: "Where did you get that?" I say: "Just flew in." The next day, there's this turtle in the sink.
"Oh no," Bat says, "Sheba's allergic to seafood!" And suddenly there are two sisters playing cards on my bed. They yell:

"Hi, Mom!" and borrow my clothes. One sleeps with her foot on my leg, one reads romance novels all night. "Who are they?" cries Batya.

I shrug. The summer I sleep here, New York is a city of open windows: Everything flies in, everything lands on me.

#### 3. Riverside Park

Three girls smoke pot upwind while the sun glares white over Jersey. Every few men, there's one who thinks he loves me.

"Hey," he beams, "baby, honey, doll." Is the city safe for women? (sic) I wear my hair short, jeans loose, running shoes ready for flight;

adopt my best tough face and still . . . "Mom," prods my fourteen-year-old, "Ya gotta learn how to drool—best way to avoid being raped."

I tell her be home by 9 sharp.
I tell her keep a quarter in her shoe.
I teach her how to look, how to run.
I tell her, "If you get in trouble . . ."

She says, "Don't worry, Mom, I'll drool." The summer I sleep in New York, we practice at the mirror, Jen and I. First we drool. Then we learn to spit.

#### 4. Broadway

The little sister sleeps in my t-shirt, raids my sanctum like a disagreeable twin. "I hate New York," she pouts, rudely circles the locals who smile

at her tanned suburban face; makes Sunday strolls down Broadway seem like x-rated movies. She decides to write a poem:

"12 donuts, 12 pizzas, 12 apples, 12 numbers, 12 chapters, 12 steps." She calls the poem, what else? "12 mommies, 12 daughters..."

"Did you know," I tell her,
"that in your lifetime you will deeply touch
at least twelve different people?"
She hugs me, makes me first on the list.

The summer I sleep in New York, Emily counts stars from the window. Her eyes peer, dark as mine; her visions are echoes of wonder and pain.

#### 5 Pier 88

My tatoo is red with black legs: a five-day spider from 42nd Street. I cover it with gauze when I bathe, hope to prolong its life. My daughter screams

at her first rock concert.

I wait outside, imagine her voice drowning the rest. The sound carries me above the river,

above Manhattan Island. Meanwhile, her father floats by on my left, captain of MacDonald's blimp. He says: "Mothers who wear spiders

don't deserve to bake apple pies. Furthermore, mothers who spend their time making poems should be shot down over the Hudson."

The summer I sleep here, New York offers fruits I've never tasted. I feed them to my daughters, one seed at a time.

#### 6. Cathedral

Words rise from the stone floor, circle sculptures like wind.
I choose a weathered chair, inhale dust and light from air that

welcomes poets and prisoners, women-priests, and children in yellow day-care shirts. I hide beside a pillar, exhale

endwords to a new sestina while the sun pours thick blue rays into my lap, offerings from the Rose window.

The summer I sleep here, New York is a riddle of cool places. On the hottest days, I search until each breath becomes a prayer.

#### 7. Brooklyn Bridge

My veins inflate with city air, my blood hums Manhattan. I walk into the night, ignore the heat, grow leaner by the minute.

I think about danger: how a woman learns to sense it, how it rises with the moon over Brooklyn and floods the east side of everything.

The city blazes with candles. Trains inch like jeweled caravans across the water. The bridge steals around me, catches me

in a weave of sound and silver.

I straddle Wednesday, Thursday;
July, August. My senses peak
to the level of music.

The summer I sleep in New York, the ceremonies are of self and severing. When I die, it will be here, poised between fear and light.

## TESTIFYING ADORATION

## Karla Jackson-Brewer

I want to tell folks I love you Tell all the folks

#### I LOVE YOU

Make a public announcement over the radio A proclamation on the steps of city hall Acknowledge your contribution to this glorious affair I want to tell all the people that

I LOVE YOU

Going to Rockefeller Center
Just to carve your name in the ice
Skate your initials
A visible sign to all the voyeurs in the balcony
Eternally professing my love
Until they re-ice for the next session.

I'm going inside to sip hot cocoa Hope to read a love fortune in the bottom of my cup Compelled to leave a note to the waitress with my tip

"Please inform all patrons that this woman is in love"

I'm going to hide mementos in the public library
Offer your business card to check out a book
Concerning passionate affairs
Ancient do-or-die passionate affairs
Run hide in the mountain/sea/ against all odds affairs.

You make my head light
Mojo so strong this stable Virgo's tipsy with
ROMANCE

I feel in the tips of my fingers to the edges of my toes Where the energy leaves my body and flows Round, around a field which Saddles me in an aura of

**AMOUR** 

Re-affirming that love for you On a cosmic plane.

Standing in subway stations
I shout it above the steel-crushing-steel
Shared it like an umbrella on a rainy day
In the bakery, spread it with the frosting, on the honey buns
Danced it in disco mirrors
Walking down the street my smile precedes me by a block
The giggle/laugh/guffaw spontaneously uttered
At the most inappropriate moments
Means
The rumors are true
Wearing truth like a festival banner

**LCONFESS** 

**ILOVE YOU** 

Sometimes I want to go to church And I don't mean High Episcopalian, either Go to CHURCH Careen/sway/reel Jerked by the Holy Ghost In the name of love Start me singing In the depth of my spirit Get me humming baby JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE Went to church on your love and testified Told all the folks I love you From the church sisters to all my ancestors In heaven above Possessed With the power of the feeling And the Glory of loving you FOR EVER AND EVER

**AMEN** 

#### I Tishri/Rosh Hashonah

for L. V.

Melanie Kaye/ Kantrowitz

In bed this morning light comes from two directions:
west, south: bathing the oldest cat in new sun. I watch the still-green trees on the verge of turning red, yellow: today begins the different year, day first in the Jewish world, the name

is Rosh Hashonah for the 5746th time. Love names my hands over your body and your light hair brings sun into the room, even at dusk. We're different but our hungry bodies wake in all directions twining as the earth turns making each other new

as our love is new, and the downstairs kittens, and the new page in my book. My people's history is old, named before the Book was written, before Moses returned from Sinai, before Sarah brought Isaac into the light. My people, scattered in four directions over the world, each hour meet this day differently

with prayers songs memory indifference—day for apples and honey—to coat the new harvest ample and sweet, directing us to remember *l'shana tova*—may your name be inscribed sweetly, as light moves west over the ocean and Jews turn

to or from the name Jew, turn
to shul or to the bleached indifference
of America where history weighs in light,
less and less, until we are scraped as new
as the bland norm with the shortest name
urging enter forget here is the one direction.

In bed with you this morning I wonder what directions
Jews take today; tomorrow; is it our turn
to heal—just a little—nothing to name
with history? Does love, does memory make a difference?
Do I know a song to sing my new
love for the new year's light?

HOH!

And are my people's directions so different we share only a name? and what will this new year turn over into the light?

#### Morning Song

for L.V.

to wake with you too early in a room once tidy impersonal: strewn with our clothes peeled off after hours it seemed of groping days of circling closer closer landing at last on a motel bed a hot river where waters spin

that morning and since my head spins—
a new planet is there room
for us can we wear or not wear
anything we like lose buttons break our clothes'
zippers tear through elbows made to last
a lifetime? you ask for one day.

in the bed alone this morning I see days of separate orbits moving nearer spinning a web maybe sturdy enough to last two women sliding back and forth between the room of the self and the vast sky of the unclothed other maybe nowhere

either of us has been somewhere I want. tired dazed at the IGA or at the laundry washing clothes when the machine lights *rinse spin* my hours lined up like an army my room swollen with tasks phone calls and the last

women who shared it was to last forever, we said laughing. I wear this fact like a flame the room of my heart. I let only for days hold the desk's edge when the floor spins keep the drawers closed:

control: the pulse that clothes
the heartbeat. you're not the last
woman I'll love but spinthe-bottle wherever
it lands I want you could have you for days
in my arms on my tongue or fingers in any room.

leave your clothes anywhere. at the rim of the heart we spin each day and may this not be our last room.

# RHODAWALLER My Daughter's House

I am here in my daughter's house, upstairs beneath the peaked roof of her log cabin. I write at her desk, a large desk of solid maple given to her by my mother. The door to the unfinished balcony of the cabin is open. The sky is white, almost overcast, with drifting clouds. Only small patches of blue are visible. The wind blows the tops of the trees; the aspen leaves quiver. Her son and mine are playing by the creek, laughing and shouting. Now and then her dog barks as part of their play.

I have not been here before. My daughter's house, my daughter's life, is com-

posed of the stuff of my own memories.

The cabin is beautifully constructed of weathered golden cedar logs. Upstairs here, she sleeps on a maple bed. She sleeps alone, almost always. Her bed is covered with a white antique quilt; the window above her bed is draped on one side with a square of white handmade lace, with a pattern of paired birds which appear to be gathering materials for nesting; on the other side with a turquoise blue square of cotton gauze, printed about the edges with vines and flowers. Tiny crocheted flowers dangle from its borders. These curtains are caught and held back to the window frames, falling in graceful parabolic curves, beyond which I see more trees, more sky. In the window is also one hanging plant, an ivy, and a small crystal to diffract the morning light and make dancing rainbows on the floor.

Of the crystal she says, "Oh, Mom, you should see it when the full moon is shin-

ing through it."

She is orderly, all objects in her house are arranged for symmetry and harmony. Her bed is centered beneath the window; to the right of the bed is a wall hanging, a small square of Chinese embroidery, the gift of a friend. The embroidery, in gold metallic thread on a black background, depicts a large bird at the center, with wings outspread, flying towards a circular red sun in the upper left hand corner of the square.

"I call it a fire-bird," she says, "because it's flying to the sun. It reminds me of the hexagram in the *I Ching*, 'The Preponderance Of The Small,' that says a bird should not try to surpass itself and fly into the sun, but should return to the earth where its post is 'Creat Good Fortupe'" Says my days been

where its nest is. 'Great Good Fortune.'" Says my daughter. I myself believed in flying always towards the sun.

Beneath the hanging, and against the wall, is an ancient wooden steamer trunk, with my daughter's clothes in a neat pile on top of it.

To the left of her bed on the window wall is a rectangular mirror with a red frame, and in the upper left hand corner of the mirror my daughter has inset a

card given to her at the birth of her son—a picture of the nativity, but in the style of Boticelli, and drawn by a woman. Only women are represented in the drawing. Beneath the mirror is a bedside table covered with a paisley shawl. On it is a kerosene lamp, a small stack of books—Macrobiotics as a Way to Happiness, Woman in a Sexist Society—and a small wooden box filled with matches. The box is of rough wood, but perfectly proportioned, painted with astrological signs, and had been made for her by the man she loved when she was fourteen. Michael. I remember that.

Between the cedar logs upstairs here, are thick pads of insulation. I think of my daughter alone here in the winter, the snow on the roof heavy and silent, a great silence except for the wind. She has written to me of the winter, of the frost patterns on her window, of the moonlight on the snow.

On the window sill above her bed—a photograph of her son; a tulip-shaped candle holder with petals of rose-colored translucent shell; a large scalloped sea-

shell filled with smaller shells, stones and seasmoothed glass.

In the center of the room the chimney rises from the floor below and passes through the roof. Taped to the chimney are pages from last year's Sierra Club calendar—a photograph of autumn leaves on the meadow; a photograph of the sun seen through a copse of lodgepole pines in Idaho, long shadows stretched upon the snow; a photograph of the desert, Canyonlands National Park in Utah.

In my daughter's house I find myself, my continuity, that which I had lost and

forgotten, and which she has preserved.

\* \* \* \* \*

I sit at my daughter's desk. Above her desk, taped to the logs, are photographs of her family. It is a small family. There is a photograph of her son, there is a photograph of her brother, and there is a photograph of me.

Hanging on nails protruding from the chimney is her red flannel bathrobe, her white cotton nightgown sprigged with flowers, and, temporarily, my own flower

printed flannel nightgown.

Now it is dusk, and very still. The birds have just finished their evensong and have returned to their nests. The peepers and frogs have not yet begun to sing. The wind is at last still. I have lighted the kerosene lamps, a soft glow. I have fed the children and put them to bed. I have washed the dishes, pouring hot water from the stove into her white enamel dishpan, and added cold water from the kitchen pump. I have finished, and rinsed the tin sink. My daughter has gone out. When she returns, the lamp will welcome her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Early morning. My daughter has not yet returned. This night, then, she has not slept alone, and I am glad for her. It is I who sleep alone now. The rainbow from the crystal moves across the room. I go downstairs. The kerosene lamps I left to light her way burn faint in the morning light before I blow them out. I go outside and see a pale white half moon still floating in the sky. The sun rays strike the dew

on the grasses and flash brilliant as crystals. The birds are awake, singing, darting across the meadow.

And now I appear to be looking at a reverse image of the past, an upside down reflection on the many nights during her childhood, when intent upon my own pursuit of love, I had left her to keep watch, alone. Why, then, do I feel this vague sense of betrayal?

I'm restless. I want to run. I run over the grass, trampling purple heal-all, buttercups, wild strawberries, down to the shaded path that leads to the stream. At the stream I lean over the boulders and gaze into the water. At first I see only water striders skimming along the filmy surface, then minnows darting in the hollows. After a time I am aware of the reflection of the clouds, the sky and of the leaning

trees. There is nothing more. That, and the sound of moving water.

I return and seat myself again at my daughter's desk. Nothing escapes me, requiring as I do now, a re-creation. Above the desk is this year's calendar, open to the page for June, a photograph of Indian pipes growing in the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, with my daughter's appointments pencilled in, our arrival pencilled in with an exclamation point—June 21! There is a quote on this page from Ralph Waldo Emerson: 'Frogs pipe; waters far off tinkle; dry leaves hiss; grass bends and rustles, and I have died out of the human world and come to feel a strange, cold, aqueous, terraqueous, aerial, ethereal sympathy and existence. I sow the sun and moon for seeds.' There is a pencil drawing done by my grandson of an apple tree and there is a drawing that my daughter made some years ago, with deep colored inks, of mountains in the night, with a yellow sun rising in the background against a blood red sky at dawn. Here is a correspondence to the Chinese hanging.

On my daughter's desk, the old manual typewriter my mother gave her; a wooden holder for unanswered letters, which I am tempted to read, terribly tempted, since there is one from her father, and one from that other who so much later fired my imagination and desire. There is a glazed clay jar she made long ago, which now holds her colored pencils; there is a catalogue from the University of Maine; there is the letter announcing her acceptance there; there are the marks she received on her high school equivalency test; there is a notebook in which she writes her 'affirmations,' like a kid doing penance, one hundred times, I will be good, but she writes instead, 'I deserve to be loved.' There is also a diary, poems.

I open the door to the balcony. The sunlight flows into the room. I look down

upon the field, and further, to the distant hills.

I had wanted to be like the wind.

# They Had Been Making Love . . .

They had been making love for a long time, as they always did, first for a long time just kissing and touching and him murmuring to her and telling her love, what he loved, all, everything he loved about her, and how it was for him, and how good; and this, and this, and this, and that; and she, silent, as she was with him, at those times, when they were making love, because there were no words for her, no words that could begin, could say it at all, her happiness so great that she felt she would die of it, and trying to tell him with her silence, with her hands and her eyes and her body and her mouth. For a long time before he came into her, as it always was with them, and then for a long time more with him inside her, an hour, more, and the sky faintly blue at the window, as so often happened, and afterwards he was surprised, always, that there had been so much time, when he would go into the kitchen and look at the clock.

And once he had said to her, tenderly, laughing at her, just a little, he had said, you know, it can be other ways, too, just fun, sometimes, and quick, and playful, we could laugh, even, but she never laughed at those times, not with him, although she laughed a lot before, and afterwards, and during the day, and first thing when they woke, usually late, because the sky had turned pale blue before they finally slept, and then they woke, just laughing and laughing, for a long time, too. She always felt just full of laughter, all bubbling and fizzing inside her, in those days. But not when they were making love, not when he was inside her, not ever then.

Now he was inside her, and it had been a long time, and she was astride him, moving, the way they liked it, always, near the end when he grew tired, and this way it was easy, and they both liked it best. They had tried other ways, everything, of course; and it felt good when he entered her from behind, exciting, delicious, her hands pressed against the wall, or against the bed when they found themselves on the floor, or she, bent over the chair, or he, walking, even, around the room, carrying her in his arms, and they were astonished, not sure how they had gotten there, but always, always, they turned, very soon, face to face, because that was how it was with them.

And she never closed her eyes, not for a moment, with him, turning to see him, whatever way it was, not just because it was exciting, to watch his pleasure, which it was, but because it was him, not that she could forget, if she closed her eyes, but because he was so beautiful to her, and life was not long enough for this, although she knew, well of course she knew, that holding on, wanting to keep, was the worst thing; keep your hands open, let it be, she knew that, but still, she wanted to keep it, and she wouldn't come, not for a very long time.

He was so beautiful to her, that was the thing, more beautiful than any one thing, for its own sake, had ever been, and she loved him more than she had ever loved any one thing, even her children, although that had come close, but more even than that. It was only the immanence of God that she had loved this way, absolutely, perfectly, lost in it, breathless, dizzy from it, from mystery, when it would come over her, as it had, often, up in the mountains, when she'd been out for days in the silence, alone, the nights full of stars, and the leaves shaking sunlight out onto the earth, and the smell of pine and berries on her hands. Or by the ocean, on a cliff, wildflowers everywhere, and the sea, greenblue far below, the light sparkling off it like stars, so that she would lose her breath, whisper thank you, thank you, like a song inside her.

Now this man was as beautiful to her as that. So, because she trusted herself, knowing what she loved, and finding it made manifest, all concentrated here, in him, she knew that he was her path, and she wondered how, in all these years, she had never understood that it was all so simple, a man and a woman, together.

And neither did he close his eyes when they made love, watching her face, watching her, so glad, they could hardly believe their good fortune, although, sometimes, in his pleasure, his eyes would dilate, glaze, so that he couldn't see, but he always remembered her, that it was her.

They had been making love for a very long time, when it happened, all at once, her pleasure. She was coming, dissolving, and he, too, trembling, as she watched him, running his tongue up around against the inside of his cheek as always when he came, saying her name, his eyes dazed, and something happened which had not occurred before; she felt herself breaking apart, a shell, like a stone sarcophagus, in which she had been enveloped, coming apart, her body, shattering, falling away, all of it cracking and falling away, the life she had lived, all she had learned to judge and be careful of, all she had never wanted to learn about walking the world but had learned anyway, had to, all she had needed to survive, was cracking and falling away. She clung to him, terrified, crying out, trembling and shaking, all of it falling away until there was nothing of her left to be separate, discovering through the flesh the way beyond it, her spirit joining and fusing with him, and through him, with all that there was in the universe.

Afterwards she lay very still on his chest. He was petting her hair, stroking and stroking. She felt gentle and quiet and new, not quite like a baby, but open, like the little child she had been so long ago, only better. He said, softly, 'You go so far away,' and she said, 'No, oh, no, I was with you all the time,' but then he said, 'I feel as though you always go so far that I can't follow,' so she said, 'Something happened . . . something strange . . . just then . . .' and she tried to tell him but the words didn't seem to get it across at all. He said, 'Mmm . . . ,' stroking her hair once more before he fell asleep, and then, for just a moment, feeling really frightened, she thought that he was right.

#### RHODA WALLER

# Muriel Dimen SURVIVING SEXUAL CONTRADICTIONS an excerpt

There is a profound relationship between the personal and the political, between private and public life, between individual experience and culture: If you go deeply enough into one, you come upon the other. In the heart of personal life lie the commonalities linking people who belong to the same culture. At the same time, the kernel of social life holds the premises, principles, and passions that give life to each individual. Personal experience is ingrained and contoured by culture; culture is reciprocally informed and maintained by individuals and their personal principles and passions.

Because some women, largely middle-class and white, have succeeded in ascending professional and corporate ladders, it looks to the rest of society as if the feminist revolution were over. Yet many women, indeed proportionately more, remain poor. Women of color are still hampered by racism as well as sexism. Even abortion, the right to which is fundamental to women's control of their own lives, remains a battleground. And women, no matter what other work they do, continue to be in charge of rearing children.

Finally, the kind of success that feminism has had may be its failure. Once extraordinary and extreme, it is now routine. Having achieved political validity, it takes its place alongside numberless other interest groups and thereby becomes nearly invisible. Accommodated in the public mind as women's claim to economic emancipation, its radical edge is blunted. It may be that the price of accommodation, the pruning of feminism's truly radical promise of genuine equality and freedom for all, has been too high. For what has slipped into obscurity is feminism's core, utopian vision—a society, based on a humanitarian value system, in which all people have access to the material and spiritual necessities of life and are free to pursue their sexual desire, in which work is spiritually as well as financially rewarding, in which the care of children and of personal relations count as "work" and are shared by all, and in which neither race nor gender nor sexual preference can prohibit participation in the enjoyment of and running of society.

The present state of feminism is like the present state of women—ambiguous and laden with contradictions. Women are living in a time when, despite the gains they have made toward social equality, patriarchy retains a stubborn, if now more hidden, hold on all of our thoughts, feelings, and social institutions. The

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current problem is that women are supposed to live as if they were free when in fact freedom is still in the future. To live in such a particularly ambiguous circumstance is to struggle endlessly with contradiction. Ordinary life becomes a jungle on whose rooted floor it is easy to stumble, yet whose tangle is so comfortably familiar that one is often reluctant to hack away a single strangling vine. We want to shape our own lives to satisfy our own desires, yet find ourselves conforming to familiar social rules and institutions that imprison rather than free us. Still, at the same time as we collude in patterns and rules ingrained in us by childhood and tradition, we also try to resist the temptation to follow them. That we must endlessly battle against a gravity pulling us simultaneously in two directions explains why contradiction is the central metaphor for women's experience in the middle of the feminist revolution.

#### THE STRANGE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEX AND REPRODUCTION

... I think of the boyfriend I had at eighteen, whom I loved very much—and whom I held in awe—two not unconnected emotions. In those days, he and his friends were great fans of *The Ginger Man*, by J.P. Donleavy. So naturally I thought I should be, too. I tried, but it was very hard for me to see myself as the freewheeling, woman-served, and woman-leaving protagonist, a great individualist who loved planting his seed but didn't like kids or wives of any form of constancy. No doubt I took the book too literally, too personally. Perhaps I should have tried to

identify not with the character but with the spirit he represents.

This was not the first time I had had difficulty with literature that portrayed the glorious life of adult freedom in male terms. In high school, when I read *On the Road*, I wanted to be a beatnik and go on the road too, but I could never figure out what I would do when I got my period. Where would I be able to buy sanitary napkins or tampons in rural Mexico? Were you supposed to carry a supply with you? How much could you carry and still travel light? If you took all you needed, there wouldn't be any room for all those nice jugs of wine in Jack Kerouac's car. The only beatnik I knew of who even dealt with this question was a woman, Diane diPrima. In her novel, *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, her heroine describes her first big orgy and recounts the moment in it when she pulled out her Tampax and threw it across the room. A grand moment, that.

Are you thinking, how gross? I ask the imaginary eavesdropper in my head. Or, how irrelevant?

Gross, yes. Irrelevant, no. Not to me. The obligation to worry about the gross mess became a part of life from puberty on. A nagging, seemingly stupid worry became a fact of life, not quite as unnoticeable as my skin. The same nagging worry included wondering, Did they have any contraceptive jelly in Mexico? Just when during the seduction was I going to put in my diaphragm? Once it was in, would it stay in? And when the time came to take it out, how, where, and with what would I wash it?

Needless to say, I never went "on the road." But I often wonder what it would have been like to have come of age a bit later on. What would I have thought about movies like An Unmarried Woman, Julia, or Norma Rae? Books like The Color Purple, or Woman Warrior or Rubyfruit Jungle? Television shows like Mary Tyler Moore or Cagney and Lacey? Would Isadora, the heroine of Fear of Flying,

have been a role model for me? Maybe she would have inspired me to go hunting for the perfect "zipless fuck." But then again, look what happened to Theresa, the heroine of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. She got murdered. Of course, Isadora was married, and her husband takes her back in the end. Theresa was single. Maybe you have to be married to a well-to-do psychiatrist to have sexual liberation without losing your life, at least in novels and movies.

No, probably my role model would have been Ingrid Bengis. As she told her story in Combat in the Erogenous Zone, you could be a single woman and have lots and lots of sexual adventures but you had to be willing to roll with the hard and

sometimes discouraging punches.

In Western mythology, men often pursue an adventure that becomes a journey to self-realization, a rite of passage to the neatly bounded, orderly adult self. This adventure-journey to individualization exposes the hero to all kinds of dangers and challenges that provide him with repeated occasions to prove himself and emerge a self-reliant, self-defined being with a sense of autonomy and agency. Works of literature possessing the force of cultural myth, such as *The Odyssey*, express the rule that only men may go through this process of self-discovery. Odysseus is sent by Zeus, after the fall of Troy, on a series of marvelous, life-threatening, oatsowing, and character-testing escapades, while his equally resourceful wife, the quiet, clear-eyed Penelope, faithfully keeps the home fires burning.

In The Odyssey and other such heroic epics, the journey that women take is only implied. Present by near-omission, its route and destination are sketched in by the lightest vet most definitive of strokes. The only successful adventuresses in The Odyssey are the goddesses; mortal women, like Penelope and her servant Eurykleia, stand and wait. Not for them the dazzling feats of daring and courage. the intensity of amorous encounters. While the hero has adventures, women seem to tread a winding path that often doubles back on itself. They do the work that is both honored, because the dog-tired hero depends on being able to benefit from it, and denigrated, because it is never done. This is the emotional housekeeping of human life, whose purpose is to ensure that others have what they need so that they may be what they want. Like cleaning up rooms and clothes and dishes, only so that they can be used and dirtied anew, this maintenance work of "relatedness" is repetitive and endless. While Odysseus weeps for Penelope by day and revels with the goddess Calypso in nightly pleasure, Penelope steadily keeps his social place for him. Each day, she weaves a shroud. Each night she unrayels it so as to delay its completion and thus put off the subsequent selection of a successor for Odvsseus' bed and throne.

The cultural truths portrayed in myth have a way of becoming personal ones. The journey toward individualization and the path of relatedness, genderless in principle, are attached to men and women by myth and thereby made to seem as though given to them by nature. But individualizing and relatedness are in fact ways of being that are mandated by culture and influential in personal life. Linked to masculinity and femininity, they inform both social institutions and cultural expectations. They filter into the individual experience of real men and women through traditional mythology and books, movies, and television as well, which

give us the mythology of our present culture.

These mythologies, by seeming to describe what *is*, manage to prescribe what *ought to be*. The ways of being assigned to men and women thereby exert an almost irresistible, uneradicable moral influence on personal experience. Even when women are depicted as setting off on the journey toward individualization, as is increasingly the case in books and movies, they are portrayed as doing so in reaction to, or in spite of, the path to relatedness that is still regarded as their traditional life course. That this realism reflects women's actual experience of liberation in no way diminishes the prescriptive force exercised by the notion of men's and women's proper ways of being.

In real life, even though men may not always embark on actual travels, their voyages to adulthood are endowed by cultural values with the glamour of the heroic, lone traveler, from Odysseus on. Their passages to adulthood celebrate independence, singularity, and the discovery and creation of subjectivity. They honor the "self-as-individual" who is responsible for himself and no one else, the adult self of our culture that all adults are supposed to be. They contain the thrill and excitement of sexual encounters. Whatever their content, they are linked in principle to the universal and the transcendent, creativity and achievement, abstract reason and tangible, enduring results. In consequence of this glorification, men identify primarily with the individualizing journey, just as they do with wanting and subjectivity. They forget the domestic path, just as they do wanting-to-bewanted and the process of "objectification," of being stripped of desire and transformed into an object without will or life.

This is not to say that in real life women cannot make this rite of passage toward personal agency. They can and, indeed, are required to become individualized adults. Nor are they denied sexual adventure in the process. However, their route to self-realization is a little more complicated and a little less exciting because of that. Just as women are Subject-as-Object, so they must individualize yet simultaneously tread an additional path, that of connectedness. Women's self-realization entails becoming a self that is connected to other people, an inherently contradictory situation in our culture where adults are supposed to be self-sufficient. Just as women become the-one-who-wants-to-be-wanted, so they become the "self-for-other," a "self-in-relation." And the path of relatedness they take winds through the mundane particularities of personal life, the pragmatics of caring and nurturing, and the ambiguously shifting light of emotional fireworks, everyday halftones, and private darkness.

Unfortunately, the meaning given by our culture to sex and reproduction makes the individualizing journey somewhat hazardous for women and the path of relatedness the one of least resistance for them. Sex is sex for both men and women, but it is something more for women. The sexual act ends, for men, in orgasm. For women it either does or does not end in reproduction. Reproduction is a fact of life that women may never forget because, according to our culture, they are responsible for it. Their responsibility is, however, not only for babies. They are bound as well to see to warmth and intimacy and shared history, to weave a soft bed of intangible connections on which the weary traveler, and all human beings, may come to rest. Reproductive responsibility is an accountability for the connective tissue of human existence, a political burden that women must bear personally.

Women are responsible for babies and children, not so much because they give birth to them, but because our culture puts them in charge of relatedness itself. Reproduction is not merely about conceiving and giving birth to a child. It is about raising that child. A newborn child is not only a biological organism; it is a creature in need of other people on whose care it depends and that it will eventually be able to reciprocate. A baby requires to be fed and cleaned by someone else. But it also needs to be held and loved, for when a baby is born, a relationship flowers as well. Each infant depends on being connected to someone else, because human beings are social creatures. Relatedness is the web, usually woven by women in our culture, in which all adults live out their lives.

The accountability for relatedness makes sex a very different and often more sober affair for women than for men. Women, burdened by this extra baggage on their attempted journey toward self-realization, tend not to be as lighthearted as their male counterparts. It is impossible to be casual about the challenge and danger of getting pregnant. Although pregnancy may prove womanhood to both women and society, its mooring in relatedness has profound psychological and physical effects on the course of a woman's life that may fall quite short of the

conventionally heroic.

For every woman—heterosexual, lesbian, young, old—sexuality is inextricably entangled with reproductivity, that is, with procreation and relatedness as felt and socially instituted. This responsibility requires female travelers to think about boring things like condoms and diaphragms, which interfere tediously with heroic self-realization. They must either be thinking about birth control or, if lesbian, postmenopausal, voluntarily sterilized, or fertile and wanting to get pregnant, feel relieved at not having to think about it. They may have to stop their masturbatory sexual fantasies long enough to figure out what kind of contraception will best fit the scenes they have constructed. Or they may have to halt their passion for a moment in order to insert a diaphragm, if they haven't already initially damped it by inserting the diaphragm in advance. Or they may risk their health by taking a pill or wearing an intrauterine device. Finally, those who decide to take a chance can have the thrill of forgetting about having to remember not to get pregnant.

#### DAMNED IF THEY DO, DAMNED IF THEY DON'T

Since the 1960s a new kind of cultural mythology has sprung up, in which the revolution in contraception has freed women to determine the course of their reproductive lives. Like all mythologies, this one tells only part of the truth. Certainly, the relationship between sex and reproduction is no longer as enigmatic as it was for women twenty-five years ago. The remarkable changes in the technology of reproduction paralleled by the increase in women's knowledge about their own health and by shifts in the law, have substantially altered women's sexual options and reproductive responsibility. Where women once had to search carefully and shamefully for doctors willing to prescribe birth control, they now can choose to go to clinics serving their sexual and reproductive needs exclu-

sively. They can consult books replete with accurate and useful information about women's reproductive anatomy, pregnancy, genital diseases and remedies, and sexuality. In part because the medical industry has become more receptive to consumer demands and in part because feminists raised the issue of women's special health needs, gynecologists, too, are more informed and receptive to women's wishes to participate in decision making about their own bodies. Birthing has changed as well; natural childbirth and midwive's have become an accepted part of the medical scene.

Contraception has amplified both women's sexual and their reproductive choices. The range of birth-control methods, and availability of which was mandated by legislatures, adds the pill, the intrauterine devices, and sterilization to the diaphragm, cervical cap, and spermicidal foam. The pill, in particular, has permitted many women to sample the fear-free immediacy of sexual gratification always available to men. Contraception also permits women to decide when, if at all, they will conceive. The legalization of abortion grants those who can afford it some flexibility in deciding what to do should they become pregnant by accident. Women can now find out for themselves whether or not they are pregnant by buying a simple, over-the-counter kit. And amniocentesis offers them the opportunity to decide in advance whether they wish to bear a child who is genetically damaged.

However, the mythology of women's reproductive freedom omits the truth that the basis on which they exercise such choice is shaky. Part of the problem is that women do not control the manufacture or sale of the technology of reproduction, nor is it made entirely in their interest. Methods of birth control remain either awkward, dangerous, or unsightly. Foam continues to be as completely untrustworthy as ever. Diaphragms are unaesthetic and clumsy, as well as occasionally unreliable. Birth-control pills and intrauterine devices may be physically harmful, and they do not always work. Were this technology created in the direct interests of women, rather than in those of profit making, it would be safer, more reliable, and more aesthetic.

Furthermore, the degree of availability of such technology suggests that reproductive choice is still more an ideal than a reality. Not all women can afford it. The most reliable forms of birth control are still available only with a prescription, which adds the cost of a doctor's visit to the cost of birth-control devices. Sexually active teenagers depend on their parents' money to pay for contraception. Financial constraints also apply to amniocentesis and abortion, which are presently privileges of the middle and upper classes. In many states, welfare payments serve none of women's reproductive interests. In some, they cover the cost of abortion, but require parental notification for girls under the age of eighteen. In other states, welfare may fund sterilization but not abortion, an exclusion that subtly encourages, if not forces, women receiving welfare to choose not to choose by selecting a permanent form of birth control. Many critics have castigated this trend as a subtle form of genocide, insofar as disproportionate numbers of black, Hispanic, and Native American women receive welfare. In any event, these inequities mean that reproductive choice belongs primarily to middle- and upperclass women.

Yet increasing numbers of young middle-class women who have never borne a child are selecting sterilization as their form of contraception. It may be that the

expense, unreliability, and ugliness of presently available contraceptive methods for women underlie this trend. But it is also likely that young, fertile women are "choosing" to make themselves permanently incapable of having children because the basic structure of reproduction and relatedness has not changed. They may feel, consciously or unconsciously, that their responsibility for relatedness continues to be a burden that, in effect, allows them no choice at all.

The problem of reproductive freedom is not merely the material one of technological innovation, as the mythology simplistically has it, but rather the complex, psychological, and cultural one of relatedness. Now, as in 1960, unexpected pregnancy presents women with all the contradictions they experience in the rest of their lives. Here a woman is truly Subject-as-Object. The pregnancy happens in her body, but her decision about whether she should terminate it is not entirely her own. She is held personally responsible for being pregnant, but any decision she makes is so hedged by cultural values and social institutions as to be taken out of her hands. An unplanned conception may disrupt other parts of her life. But once pregnant, she is thought to have no other life. She is defined as a self-inrelation whose work is domestic work, even though she is expected to earn a living as well. . . .

As things stand women are, in this matter as in others, Subject-as-Object, having to shoulder their responsibility for relatedness as best they can, while recognizing that they are hindered from doing so. They are second-class citizens at the mercy of the state, of those who make the laws about what they will do with their bodies. Their rights, such as that to abortion, are taken for granted by many young women who came of age in the 1970s. But, in fact, these rights are treated merely as privileges that can be rescinded at any moment. They are presently under governmental attack and have been ever since the conservative political backlash arose against the very feminist success that secured them in the first place. Feminist activism, taken by many to be dated, therefore continues to be necessary to protect these rights until women finally have first class citizenship in law. Only then will their reproductive freedom be firmly anchored, and only then will they be able to discharge their reproductive responsibility with full competence, confidence, and pleasure.



Lisa and Grandmother Ruth

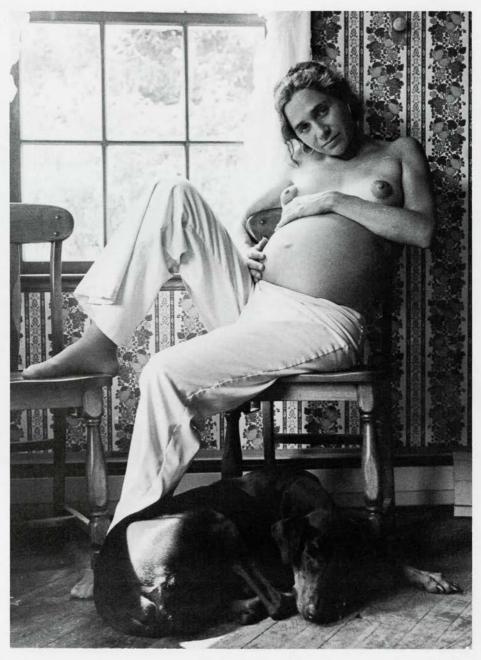
#### Carol Ginandes Portraits



Millie and Joe



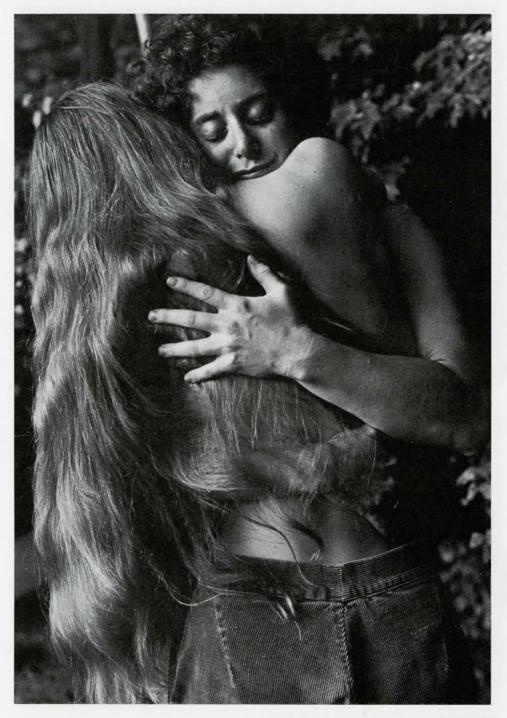
Sally and Boo



Meg



Vicky and Bernadette



Diane and Cherry

## GUILTY OF INNOCENCE MARGARET RANDALL

The moon opens my palms, my hands are full of the distance between themselves, full with my first power.

My schoolyard's trees are larger now, their branches heavy, a great shade.

Memory stands up.

These trees once small as I was small.

My hands, their palms straining against a loss of memory (loss, no, we do not *lose* this image of our lives. It is taken from us. Stolen. Raped.)

Abraham Bomba speaks.
"That night was the most horrible night for all the people, because of the memory of all those things that people went through with each other—all the joys and the happiness and the births and the weddings and other things—and all of a sudden, in one second, to cut through without anything, and without any guilt of the people, because the people weren't guilty at all.
The only guilt they had was that they were Jewish."
Abraham Bomba, survivor of Treblinka.

Daily suffocation, continuous beatings, violation of trust, abuse and holocaust wear the magnet thin, take power. Ours. Mine. Hands empty at our sides, resignation stand-in for loss.

Jewish is not guilty.
Poor is not guilty.
Black is not guilty.
Being a child, being small is not guilty.

Woman is not guilty. Lesbian or gay man are not guilty. Having a different body is not guilty. Having different ideas is not guilty.

This plateau is a great and quiet place. Cool breeze whips to wind, inflates the world between my palms.

Take it slow, this is all you may want to do today and the wanting here in your hands is strong, your process.

Motke Zaidl and Itzhak Dugin:
"When we first opened the graves, we couldn't help it, we all burst out sobbing. But the Germans almost beat us to death.

We had to work at a killing pace . . . beaten all the time, and with no tools. The Germans even forbade us to use the words corpse or victim.

The dead were blocks of wood, shit, with absolutely no importance.

Anyone who said corpse or victim was beaten. The Germans made us refer to the bodies as Figuren, that is, as puppets, as dolls or as Schmattes, which means rags."

Motke Zaidl and Itzhak Dugin, survivors of Vilna.

The rape of language, the rape of meaning.
Guilty of innocence. Innocent guilt.
Memory hibernating when memory threatens life.
Memory coming back returns survival.

Heal with these hands, which are yours. Yourself. Remember with these hands which are yours.

(Note: Survival testimonies are from Shoah, Claude Lanzmann's oral history of the holocaust.)

#### MARY MORAN



#### Four Poems

#### Backfire

Discharge. A word loaded as an automatic weapon with force of recoil and mechanical spring action for repeatedly ejecting the empty cartridge shell, introducing a new cartridge, and firing it.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy shot.

Martin Luther King, Jr. shot.

The assassination of his dreams reeks of gunsmoke and funeral flowers.

Honorable discharge from military duty at twenty, thrown into a civilian stockade of anti-war sentiment. "How many babies did you kill? How many women did you . Hey brother, bring back any 'Cong skulls? or good dope?"

Hot, humid daze. Saigon airport. Loading body bag after body bag. Some closed, some open. Eyes, mouths. He carried the weight of death home.

Discharge from involuntary commitment at mental hospitals. Conditional release into court-appointed conservatorship. The guardian, keeper of accounts and disability checks, decides where and how he lives now that he's free.

Thorazine . . . Mellaril . . . Haldol . . . Magic bullets explode on impact. Shrapnel lodged in brain tissue shreds his thoughts, feelings, spirit.

Last definition. An act of relieving something or someone that oppresses or is oppressed. Here lies the truth. Discharge. The word backfires in each of our faces. BANG! You're dead. A slug of lead festers in my heart.

The final bullet fired targets this matter of choice. Grieving, we bury his bones and ask you for accountability.

### I tell her, "History lesson. He spoke of small skulls and the bones of Vietnamese children."

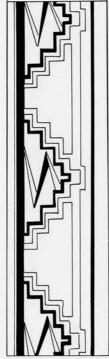
Fifteen-year-old photographs etched on the inside wall of my skull. Images of mothers drained with grief. They carry the bundled remains of their sons and daughters wrapped in coarse brown cloth. They bury their future in a homeland lost.

#### At The Kitchen Table

A rage coiled in my back, curled around and behind my heart raises its alerted head to his words.

Jaw muscles tensed and upper lip pulled back, its teeth wet with appetite's priming juices.

I see my little brother. His skull shattered. Raw bones, riddled edges hidden in the white satin folds of the burial box. Fourteen years from Saigon One year from Wisconsin Fifteen years underground The earth above him settles. The earth under me trembles.



What kind of survival is this that crowds my lungs and pushes my back into pain, then lunges forward. Its heavy head forcing itself deep into my belly. The bite piercing and unyielding as an animal trap snapped.

I see my mother collapsed at the cemetery after they handed her the folded American flag. I hear the echo of her words inside the hearse, "That flag felt like one last slap in the face from the military."

My body shakes, then tenses as I listen now to the tremble in my mother's voice, as she speaks of her only grandson approaching the age of registration for the military.

We sit together at the kitchen table.

Share the tea bag. Add milk. Stir the mixture.

Our spoons rattle the tea cups
as we plan a future that began yesterday
at home.

#### Peninsula Patchwork

Breath of cedar. A mother's hope Elder cloth hums, embroiders song.

wrapped in folds grandmother sews.

Cedar breathes daughters home.

Quilted remnants of calico women.



#### Aunt Ruth Speaks

Bending, bowing down close with the soil

To bury newly-arrived breed bulbs

One after another. Row upon row. Each year yields the next.

A lifeline of turning over clumps of earth.

Flesh-singeing sun peels back the skin, leaches out sweat.

Aching muscles full-seasoned into stiffer joints.

I'm tired, old man.

Let someone else genuflect and stalk these furrows.

Mary Moran



#### **HISTORY LESSON**

#### **JANICE GOULD**



"A terrible pestilence, an intermittent fever, was reported as having almost depopulated the whole valley of Sacramento and San Joaquin ... the country was strewn with the remains of the dead wherever a village had stood, and from the headwaters of the Sacramento to King's River, only five Indians were seen."

H.H. Bancroft

we have watched our families sicken with astonishing rapidity. In a fever, they chill to their bones, then break into a profuse sweat. The paroxysms alternate, until they are too weak to rise from where they lay and simply die. In our village, no adults are left, but onè woman so heartbroken she can do nothing but wail and smear her shorn head with pitch. The children not stricken with fever, neither sleep nor eat; they shrink with fear and grief, for the dead clamor about us, even in this silence. and poison the air with their stench. There are too many to bury. We must wander away. We cannot stay here.

Wandering, I thought I would feel no more. Then I came to a place that filled me with disgust and shame, though at first, only confusion and fear. The skinned carcasses of more than four hundred elk lay swelling in the rain at the foot of the Buttes. Two white men, with faces like bears, lived there in a small canvas tent.

Up they panted when they saw me and pointed their guns at my chest. If I escaped, it is only with a prayer, for it seems they kill everything that goes about on legs, and upon doing this cut away and take the skin, and leave the meat to rot for black-winged birds of prey.

1849: General Bidwell has hired us on to work at his gold diggings on the Feather River. When we work well, he pays us two red handkerchiefs a day, otherwise, we are paid but one.

1851: Several headmen among us Maidu, have signed a treaty with the White Government. We are to stay on the land between Chico and Ovobille clear up to Nimshew, nor are we to stray. If a man, we receive a pair of jeans, a red flannel shirt and a plow. If a woman, we get a linsey gown, a few yards of calico a pair of scissors, and some thread.

1852: At first we could not understand how the white people could settle on the land granted us by the treaty. They came in droves.

Then we learned, the U.S. Senate had secretly rejected all treaties with Maidu and other Indian tribes, and we were to be removed to Nome Lackie reservation several miles away.

1863: They told us, "Because of conflict between Indians and Whites, you will be removed, for your own safety, to the Round Valley Reservation, in Mendocino county, about three days march away." It has taken two weeks. and of the 461 Indians who began this miserable trek, only 277 have come to Round Valley. Many died as follows: Men were shot who were seen trying to escape. The sick, or old, or women with children, were speared if they could not keep up, bayonets being used, for the soldiers wanted to conserve their ammunition. Babies also were killed, taken by the feet and swung against tree trunks or rocks, to crack their skulls.

1984: There are things I don't want to think about. That chapter, for example, on California Indians which read: California Indians were a naturally shiftless and lazy people. The mission padres had no trouble bringing them in to the missions for these Indians were more submissive than the plains Indian warriors. The California Indians were easily conquered.

In the missions, the women spent time grinding corn with manos and metates, the men made adobe bricks. They mixed straw into mud and water in big molds. When the mud dried, the bricks could be removed from molds and used for buildings. Before the Spaniards came, Indians lived in brush or bark houses. California Indians were called 'diggers' because much of their diet consisted of plants and roots which they dug out of the earth with their digging sticks. "Diggers," says Mama, "I remember that word well, and they never meant anything good by it, they weren't talking about digging sticks. They said it the way they said 'nigger."

We got through the Prologue of California History, "Indians," in a single class. The next day we moved on to "The Explorers."

When mama was brought to the city, she heard a neighbor woman remark: "Why did they ever adopt an Indian? Don't they know, Indians are too dumb to learn anything!" Mama said, "I'll show her," but later, when she came to marry my dad, her future mother-in-law turned to him and said. "Why, she speaks English as well as we do!" Mama used to say, "Why can't you kids learn anything? What's wrong with you? Are you too dumb? Are you too stupid? Why don't you do as well as your friends? Why do you give up? Why do you want to fail? Why don't you make the effort?" But we said nothing at all.

Sometimes I wake up in the night and stay awake til dawn. Sometimes I wake up crying, clenching my fists. This morning it was because when I tried to report on Christopher Columbus the whole class turned away, bored, and began to talk amongst themselves. "Christopher Columbus," I began, "had two motives behind his voyage. He was intrigued by the discovery of hitherto unknown languages. and by the discovery of skull shapes and sizes that were unlike the European." Here I held up a small, round, discolored skull, then continued, "Christopher Columbus meant to sail around the world until he found a language whose sounds matched its shapes." I held up an alphabet in perfect calligraphy.

When I realized my audience was not listening to me, I became furious. The professor left the room, her eyes sad. I glared at her. "You can finish your talk," she said, "when you pull yourself together." I stood in the corner of the room and cried in humiliation and grief.

#### THE BLACK BEAR

I saw you one day eager for me while I waited outside your door, that look on your face as you came to meet me. as if a best friend were here beneath my skin. When we walked. I could feel the beating of your heart: it matched my own. A thick vine seemed to connect us. wrapping us with innocent thorns and white star-shaped blossoms.

But when I told you,
"You are in my thoughts
always," you understood
how enchanted I've become.
You turned
pale and quiet.
You looked at me
with troubled eyes.
You whispered,
"You must leave me alone."

Now I circle and circle the house.
I am black bear.
At night you hear me breathing and searching, pawing doors and windows.
There are stars in my fur, my eyes glow like pinpoints of fire.



#### **LOST FOR YEARS**

If a bird mistakenly flies in through the window and gets trapped in the house, it's bad luck. So are spiders falling from walls, serpents kept as pets, and bad thoughts. Feathers, on the other hand, are signs of health and happiness They are left around for our benefit.

However, it is good to beware the cricket's song at night. If you listen too closely the sound will find its way inside and seize your very heart. You may be like Earth Initiate who, before the beginning, floated aimlessly out there on the back of a turtle.

You may be lost for years.

**JANICE GOULD** 

### Three Poems

#### Dona Cruz

You came early to decorate for the Posada carrying a poinsettia as if you were walking in a procession.

There is a legend, you tell me, of a peasant child's gift of weeds to the Blessed Mother. They are transformed into the scarlet brilliance of poinsettias.

In the vestibule of the church you whisper how months before you heard Archbishop Romero pour his words, like baptism, over your people: a flood of campesinos down from the mountain. Poinsettias splashed the fields along the way.

Only one day later, the military silenced him as he offered Holy Mass.

On the day of his funeral you climbed the steps to his cathedral voice raised in song.
Suddenly, bombs shattered the requiem, gunfire echoed around you.
Compañeros fell five of them covered you their blood soaking your clothes.

Someone, you don't remember who, takes your hand, leads you away.

Now it is July, your poinsettia still blooms on my window ledge. Refusing to drop its leaves. Refusing to fade.

#### Fu/Return: The Turning Point

1.

I lie pinned by twisted metal
Firemen torch steel
Sparks scatter ignite my hair
Pain pulses recedes
Blood trickles into the street
a rivulet
carrying my life.

I cannot speak the language I know . . . . How he comes to be here my lover's father gripping my hands pouring words like spring water into my parched throat.

2.

Hum of blood entering
Blur of faces
my mother my father
this priest in black looms over me
alien hands anoint my forehead
conjure visions of everlasting darkness.

From somewhere deep unknown my voice shatters the vials of holy water: get out get out of here I'm not going to die.
Fighting the dark currents in his hands I surface hold fast my departing spirit.

#### Hiding from God

Hiding from God in bedrooms I believed glowed in the dark, I lay on my stomach smothered in blankets; my hands frenzied between legs taut as the hunter's bow, silently coming in arrows.

Now, thighs open to sun and stirrings of breeze, I take my time unwinding. Fingers move like sea grass, burrow in silt. Tiny fish nibble. Bubbles surface in ripples.

#### Amber Coverdale Sumrall

# Charlotte Watson Sherman LIFELINES

A time tunnel. Going back. Home. The center. Of the world. The core. Of myself. A sound. Sounds like crying. A man sobbing. My father. One of them. Tears wet his face. It rains here. But not inside. His sobs pierce. My little girl brain. I must save him. I don't know how. My arms always reach. Out. Like fishlines. Lifelines. I drown sometimes.

I tie my shoes at 4. Lace over lace. Entwined. We live with rats. I hate them. Though they have fur. I lie in bed. With my mother. My brother cries. Wants to join us. Mommy says no. Sends him away. He's always in limbo. Is this why? I laid on a mat. First time in school. Lullabies try to soothe us. I squirm like a brown wiggly worm. I never am picked. To be the good magic fairy. Tapping wands. Sprinkling gold dust. To those deserving.

I see a car. Big. Shiny. Black. There are lines. Of these big, black cars & flowers. A flag. Red, white, blue. Mommy cries. A man has died. A man she hoped. Would change things. Slowly. Neatly. Like whiskey. We move across town. A house. Our own. No rats. We have a phone. The number unknown. An old gray woman. Sends me home. From school. In my cotton & lace goodwill dresses. Down past my knees. The gray one thinks. I'll hold the class back. A kindergarten class? Yes. I am Black & poorly dressed enough. A lot of power. In a 4 year old girl. I stand in corners. For laughing. Laughing as they chant. The pledge of allegiance.

I lie. Tell my pink and Japanese neighbors. My mother is a nurse. My aunts—nurses. They don't clean white folks houses. Though they wear aprons. & starchly pressed crisp white & salmon dresses. They are nurses. I say. Nurses. The lie fills my head somehow. Why do I say this? I decide I'll be a maid. At 6, this is what I'll be. & everyone will love me. No, mommy said. Everyone does not love maids. The only disordered patients, my nurse-aunts tend: stacks & stacks. Dishes. Spoons. Cups. Glasses. They stand on swollen feet. Corns. Bunions. In fresh white nursing shoes. Tending pots. Dirty laundry.

I was a girl. Who loved to run. Head & legs greased. I flew. A young colt. No mane. 3 plaits. One cock-eyed. I cut it off. With scissors & joe egging me on. I held it in my hand. Held it to the sun. Smiled. Mommy whipped me. With a towel. Her hands. I did not know. The importance of hair. It would grow back. She did not care. I got a curl-free. The lye burned my scalp. I cried. I tried not to squirm. Or burn my eyes. More hair fell out. In patches & slimy lumps.

I was a cheetah. A gazelle. I ran like black lightning. I was called zulu. & laughs ring round the playground. I say yes. Yes. I am a Zulu. Black & proud. There were only 5 of us. In a sea of pink & gray. & words falling like spears.

#### MRS. BUMPURS

There are old brown women ancient as sun drying like deserts breasts sunken never to rise again like Eleanor Bumpurs 66 years old.

The smiling Kennedy boys
Jesus Martin Luther King
look on and smells
far from Africa fill
the room — snuff
Vicks memories
thick as molasses
strawberry homemade
jam.

Her children long gone new ones sprout to rise again eyes bright as moons calling grandma, grandma.

No one caught her as she fell core spilling marking peeling walls red

Shotguns are meant for rapists and rabid dogs police don't turn guns on themselves all blue & pink & bloody.

Where was she to go? To place her musky life? Her world to line steel shining carts? To stuff brown paper bags?

Women are tired at 66 too much washing ironing cleaning other folks children your own stretching so much life out of too little.

The gun barrels & pink-faced rats who faced her squealing "get out!" "get out!" did not surprise her.

The steel
in her voice & spine
did
as she screamed
before the blasts:
"THIS IS MY GODDAMN HOUSE,
YOU GET OUT!"

Charlotte Watson Sherman

## Charlotte Bunch MAKING COMMON CAUSE: DIVERSITY& COALITIONS

This essay is based on a speech that was given at the National Womens Studies Association annual convention in June, 1985, for the panel "Common Causes: Uncommon Coalitions—Sex, Race, Class & Age."

In my twenty years of political organizing, I have been part of numerous coalitions. Some were successful, others disastrous, and most fell somewhere in between. I am not sure that any were really uncommon. For coalitions are one of the most common strategies of creating social change, and the problems that go with them are recurring themes in all movements. Discourse about when, where and how to build coalitions is particularly important when we seek to make change that is inclusive of diverse perspectives. For feminists, especially in a country like the U.S. with so many varied groups, the ability to create a movement that includes and responds to the diversity of women's lives is crucial.

#### DIVERSITY AND DOMINATION

Patriarchy has systematically utilized diversity as a tool of domination in which we learn in childhood that such things as sex and race bring differences in power and privilege, and that these are acceptable. This idea that difference justifies domination is deeply embedded in society and defended as natural. Take, for example, the often heard refrain: "There will always be poor people" used to perpetuate class privileges. But as women who have challenged the so-called naturalness of male supremacy, feminists must also question it in other areas of domination.

When power hierarchies are accepted as inevitable, people can be manipulated to fear that those who are different are a threat to their position and perhaps even to their survival. We are taught to be afraid that "they will hurt us—either because they are more powerful or because they want our privileges." While that fear takes multiple forms depending on where we fit in the various scales of domination, all of us are taught to distrust those who are different. Some aspects of this fear may be necessary to survival—whites do lynch Blacks, men will rape women—and we must watch out for such dangers. But fear and distrust of differences are most often used to keep us in line. When we challenge the idea that differences must be threatening, we are also challenging the patriarchal assignment of power and privilege as birthrights.

Opposing the ways that differences are used to dominate does not mean that we seek to end diversity. Feminist visions are not about creating homogenized people

who all look like a blank middle class television ad. Many aspects of diversity can be celebrated as variety, creativity and options in life styles and world views. We must distinguish between creative differences that are not intrinsically tied to domination and the assignment of power and privilege based on the distinct characteristics of some. Diversity, when separated from power to control others, provides valuable opportunities for learning and living that can be missed if one is embedded in an ethnocentric way of seeing reality.

Diversity among feminists today can be a resource for gaining a broader understanding of the world. We see more clearly and our ability to create effective strategies is enhanced if we move beyond the boundaries of our assigned patriarchal slot. Quite specifically, in 1985, white women can look to the growing women of color movement in the U.S. and to feminism in the Third World. But too often we fail to respond to each other's potential for enriching our lives because of unconscious fears of race, class, or national differences. It is not just a matter of learning about race and class—although that is important—but also of under-

standing women's lives and the world as viewed by others.

Making coalitions does not mean "watering down" feminist politics as some fear. Rather, it requires engaging in a wider debate about those politics and shaping their expressions to respond to more women's realities. I see this process as reclaiming the radical spirit of feminism that calls for going to the roots of oppression. In the U.S. for example, the present wave of feminism began in the 1960's in close connection to the Black civil rights movement and its demand for recognition of the rights of racially diverse groups. Yet, racism is all too often reflected in the lack of acknowledgment of those origins and the invisibility of women of color who were a part of feminism's resurgence. As Barbara Smith notes in But Some of Us Are Brave, (Feminist Press, 1982) "Black women were a part of that early women's movement as were working class women of all races." This included famous speakers such as Florence Kennedy as well as women like the Welfare Rights mothers who worked in the late 60's in coalition with Washington D.C. Women's Liberation to achieve improvements in the city's health services for women. In the 1970's, efforts to develop diverse coalitions and a broader based agenda were often eclipsed by many factors including intense movement controversies and the media's emphasis on the pursuit of equality within the system. By focusing again on the diversity and depth of women's perspectives and needs in the 1980's, I see feminists reasserting the radical impulse for justice for all and thus strengthening the movement as a force for fundamental change.

There is commonality in the fact that all women are subordinated, but when we examine our diversity, we see that the forms that takes are shaped by many factors. Female oppression is not one universal block experienced the same way by all women, to which other forms of exploitation are then added as separate pieces. Rather, various oppressions interact to shape the particulars of each woman's life. For example, an aging Black lesbian who is poor does not experience oppression as separate packages—one sexism, one poverty, one homophobia, one racism, and one ageism. She experiences these as interacting and shaping each other.

Seeing this interaction is vital for coalitions around issues.

Too often analysis of women's oppression isolates single factors such as class or sexual preference in a simplistic manner, trying to show the effects of each sepa-

rately. But this fails to take account of their inter-relatedness. Further, it often winds up in battles over a hierarchy of seriousness of forms of oppression or over how one really is the cause of the other. But a feminist method suggests the necessity of looking at their interaction—at how race, class, sex, and age oppression shape each other. For example, race and class affect whether an older woman's problem is being abandoned in her house, trapped in an abusive nursing home, or entirely homeless. Or in looking at the exploitation of women's work, we can see the effect of factors such as race, homophobia, or physical disability, as well as class.

Strategies that fail to examine how female exploitation is shaped in different forms often set some women up against others. The interactive approach—taking into account female diversity—is thus essential for effective coalitions. However, it is often difficult to look at all the features of oppression because they are complex and demand continuous re-evaluation of our assumptions. Further, attitudes and emotions around diversity are deeply rooted and often volatile. Systems such as racism, anti-Semitism, classism, nationalism, and homophobia are so much a part of the culture that surrounds us from birth that we often have biases and blind spots that affect our attitudes, behavior, strategies, and values in ways that

we do not perceive until challenged by others.

Many problems that arise in coalitions stem from resistance to being challenged about oppressive attitudes and reactions. These need to be approached matter-of-factly, not as moral judgments on someone's personhood, but as negative results of growing up in a patriarchal culture. We must change such attitudes and behavior because they oppress others and interfere with our own humanity as well as impede the process of creating feminist strategies and coalitions. White middle class North Americans are often unaware that their perspectives—which usually coincide with the media's portrayal of reality—are not the only way of seeing the world. Since these ethnocentric biases are reinforced constantly, we must make an extra effort to see other points of view. This does not mean that nothing of this culture is of value. It simply means that we must go beyond its limits to see what can be taken as useful and not oppressive, and what must be challenged.

In looking at diversity among women, we see one of the weaknesses of the feminist concept that the personal is political. It is valid that each woman begins from her personal experiences and it is important to see how these are political. But we must also recognize that our personal experiences are shaped by the culture with all its prejudices. We cannot therefore depend on our perceptions alone as the basis for political analysis and action—much less for coalition. Feminists must stretch beyond, challenging the limits of our own personal experiences by

learning from the diversity of women's lives.

#### DIVISIVE REACTIONS TO DIVERSITY

In the 1980's, various groups, such as the women of color movement, are expanding the definitions of and possibilities for feminism. But many women's reactions to diversity interfere with making successful cross-cultural, multi-racial

coalitions. Bringing up race or class or lesbianism is not divisive to the movement. Rather I see the reactions to issues of diversity as divisive rather than the issues themselves. I want to outline here some of the reactions that I have seen interfere with efforts at coalition building and suggest ways of getting beyond them.

The most obviously divisive reaction is becoming defensive when challenged around an issue of diversity. If you are busy making explanations about how some action or comment was not really what you meant, it is hard to listen to and understand criticism and why it is being made. This does not mean passively accepting every critical comment—for in dealing with such emotional topics, there will be exaggerations, inaccuracies, or injustices that must be worked out. But these problems do not excuse anyone from struggling with the issues. If you remain open, while retaining a sense of your own authenticity, it is usually possible to deal with these by listening and responding constructively. If a critique does not make sense to you, ask about it, or try to figure out what led to it—even if it seems unfair. It is not always easy to listen to criticism first and then sort through what it means, but it is the job of feminists to do just that. To listen carefully, to consider what other views mean for our work, and to respond through incorporating new understandings where appropriate—this is a feminist necessity if we are to make coalitions among diverse women.

Often defensiveness is related to another unhelpful reaction which is *guilt*. It may be appropriate to experience shame over the actions of one's ancestors or at how one has participated in another's oppression. But personal guilt is usually immobilizing, particularly if one sits with it for long. Successful coalitions are not built around feeling sorry for others or being apologetic about one's existence. Coalitions are built around shared outrage over injustice and common visions of how society can be changed. Few of us had control over our origins and the point is not to feel guilt about the attitudes or privileges that we inherited. The question is what are we going to do about them now—how are we going to change ourselves and work to end domination in the world? For example, white women feeling sorry about something like racism is not as useful to women of color as

working to eliminate it in society as well as in one's personal life.

Often women are side-tracked by *over-personalization* when dealing with diversity. The issues raised are personal and do require individual change, but it is important not to get stuck there. Sometimes feminists get so involved in trying to be pure and personally free of any oppressive behavior that they become paralyzed and fear taking any political action because it might not be correct. Yet it is through concrete efforts to challenge domination—no matter how small—that we learn and can become more effective and more inclusive in our political work. For example, if a man tells me that he is becoming totally anti-sexist but is not in some way challenging the structures of patriarchal power that continue to oppress women, then his personal changes—if I believe him at all—are of minimal value to me. The same is true for women of color who see some whites talking about racism but not taking action against it in the world.

Another aspect of overpersonalization is withdrawal. Sometimes feminists have become so personally hurt by criticism or feel so left out when a group is creating its own space, that they withdraw from political engagement. For example, some heterosexual women during the height of lesbian feminist challenges in the 1970's

withdrew into their feelings of being attacked or left out rather than working on how they could fight homophobia while still being with men personally. This only reinforced the separation between us. I see similar behavior among some white women today. The hurt is often understandable because there is pain in confrontations around difficult issues, and feminists sometimes spend more energy criticizing women's oppressive behavior than opposing the systems of oppression. Still reacting to this by withdrawing prevents learning from what has happened and growing to the point where coalition is possible. This is sometimes like children who want to be center stage and pout when not in the forefront. Instead we need to see that at any given moment one group may be the creative edge of the movement but that will enrich all of us in the long run.

One of the more infuriating reactions is acting weary and resentful when someone brings up "that issue" again. No one is more tired of homophobia and having to bring it up again than a lesbian like myself. I am sure women of color feel the same way about racism, Jewish women about anti-Semitism, the elderly about ageism etc. But the problems still exist and someone must address them. Until feminists can learn to include the concerns and perspectives of those women whose oppression we do not directly experience, then others will have to keep bringing up those issues. We must strive to become "one-woman coalitions"—capable of understanding and raising all issues of oppression and seeing our relationship to them—whites speaking about racism, heterosexuals about homophobia, the able-bodied about disabilities, etc. Only as we do this will we be able to build lasting coalitions.

The last divisive reaction that I want to include here is *limiting outspoken "minority women" to "their issues.*" When someone speaks out strongly about her group's specific oppression, she often becomes a token whose leadership in other areas is restricted. For example, I have felt pressure either to work only on lesbian issues, or to downplay them if I am involved in other areas of feminist activity. Yet, while I am out of the closet and concerned about homophobia, there are many other topics that I want to address besides lesbianism, just as women of color have much to say about many issues in addition to racism. To counter this tendency, I decided in the late 70's that I would not write any more only about lesbianism, but instead I would address other subjects and include within those my lesbian feminist analysis. Women of all races, classes, ages, and nations have much to say on a whole variety of topics from their particular perspectives. If we limit each to one identity and approach feminism as a string of separate unrelated issues, we narrow the possibilities for insight, growth, and leadership throughout the movement.

Our chances of building successful coalitions are greater if we can avoid divisive reactions such as these and see diversity as a strength. As we struggle to learn from our differences rather than to fear or deny them, we can find our common ground. In this process, we also build the atmosphere of good faith and respect which is necessary for strong coalitions. For while we do not always need to love or even like one another or agree on everything, we do need to be able to challenge each other from the assumption that change is possible. Another requirement when diverse groups coalesce is that each must be clear about its bottom

line. We must each know what we need in order to survive in a coalition and how to communicate that to others.

Coalitions that are successful must also be aimed at taking meaningful action in the world. Coalition is not abstract. It functions when groups or individuals are working together around something that each cares about and sees as advancing their goals or vision, or at least protecting the space necessary to develop. When a coalition has some effect then it is worth going through all the trouble and strife of making it work. In any case, it is in the process itself that we often discover the common causes that make it possible to create common coalitions of women in all our diversity working toward both common and varied feminist visions.

#### THE WOMAN MATHEMATICIAN

She has nightmares that, instead of killing all the sines and cosines but itself sin n-nought x kills only itself, puffs everything

else up forever.

And she dreams, instead of the Dirac delta being 0 everywhere but 0, its 0 only at 0.

And the *two*-dimensional delta is like the sky at night, only one star.

Then she nightmares even that star filling up.

She dreams everything dark and tall

the ground the bottom of a giant hole; she dreams it's time to fill the hole up.

She lies there and dreams the entire bottom shot up, like the tall grass and sunflowers from her childhood.

She dreams plants grow fast, the forest dense, a-sub-n's and b'sub-n's plaguing the board; she dreams the erasers are gone.

She dreams she writes over; there is no other Riemann sheet, everything just gets crowded.

She dreams the a-sub-n's and b-sub'n's leave the board, unperturbed as Escher-animals leaving the canvas.

They flit about the room and no a-sub-n can find itself.

The air buzzes with c-sub-n's, d-sub-n's, n-sub-n's and the students are growing restless.

"Get rid of them," they demand. "And get rid of them quick."

But it's no use; they have begun.

She tries multiplying. She tries integrating.

But they breed.

They breed but good.

They breed for blood.

There is no room left.

Cohen



**Marion** 

#### WAITING FOR THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE

They're getting it all ready. They're turning on the gravity. Turning off the anti-gravity. Blowing life into the lizards. Death into the stones. Anesthetizing the little airplane models. They're giving everything hyperactivity drugs. They're tuning the tuning forks. They're inventing the wheel. They're creating the world. It'll take them half an hour

In the Planetarium, the heavens must be as contained in that little machine as my poems in the ball of the Selectric.

In the Optics room, the mirrors must repeat only the likeness of the beholder, and not get carried away and repeat the beholder herself.

And up here, in the fourth-floor math-corner the regular polygons mustn't sprout pimples. The magic squares must work at least nine times out of ten.

And the polyhedra mustn't let any vertices escape. so V+F-E continues to wax 2.

Everything must proceed like a college lab experiment. All must be fixed as professional wrestling. And as for the heart that famous giant heart with its plastic pulp its fake slime they're making certain that beat doesn't sign off not accelerate into a scream. In other words, they're making dead sure that heart doesn't turn into a womb



#### THE THEORY CREATOR

"There are the problem-solvers, and there are the theory-creators..." Paul Halmost, about mathematicians

If I'm such a childlike poet, how come my child won't read my poetry?

If I'm such a good teacher, how come he won't let me near his homework?

If I'm so good at being happy, how come he doesn't like to sing?

If I'm so good at having temper tantrums, how come he's better?

If I'm such a good mother, how come every morning he's as grumpy as a husband?

If I'm such a good mathematician, why can't I solve this problem child?

He's a Separate Individual.

There are special stresses.

God is framing me up.

They never promised me a rose garden.

These are not explanations.

Any more than "due to the unusually high number of qualified applicants."

I am a theory-creator, not a problem-solver.

The first time I mutter this, I mutter it bitterly. But then immediately I say it again. This time, joyfully.

For that's the explanation.
Of course. I was always a theory-creator.
I was never a problem solver.

Maybe it's a factor of 2.

Maybe it's a factor of 2,000,000.

Maybe it's a factor of 2 to the aleph-null.

Maybe time is really three-dimensional.

Maybe there's no connection between a cube of space and the object it contains.



These theories are not fashionable mathematics.
The universities did not understand them.
The journals did not publish them.
They got me my degree just barely.
And they never solved the problems they were created to solve.

I was never a problem-solver.
I am, in fact, a problem-creator.
A theory, in fact, is a problem.
It is a universe of problems.
I certainly create more problems than I solve.
Including this problem-child.

Maybe he's a solipsist.

Maybe he's an existentialist.

Maybe he really is from Mars

Maybe he's just another one of the theories

I've created.

Maybe he needs me to not be a childlike poet. Maybe he needs my next pregnancy to last more than five weeks.

Maybe he needs a new bike.

My theories stalk the night.

Find their way, perhaps, to some other mother, some other child.

As for me, as for him, they are the wrong road.

He's the problem-child, and I'm the problem-adult.

I am a good teacher, good poet, good mother, good mathematician.

But I am not a problem-solver; I am a theory-creator. I am a theory-creator.

I say it again—this time, at peace.



Marion

Cohen

#### Mari Alschuler

#### The Bus Ride Back

I miss you, all thirty-four years of you etched into glass on a finely blown cup. You'd relish autumn's leaf-painting, the hue and cry of jays zigzagging along, up where the evergreens touch the tender sky. Flecks of light dance off the bus window. My palm flat on the glass reaches what I cannot give you: apt descriptions of slow metamorphoses in a single tree, each small dissolution of chlorophyll a loving surrender to burgundy, salmon, ochre, russet, lemon. How will I recall them? I turn on my light to draw the colors down for you tonight.

#### Paula Finn

#### where I live

one night I was walking home from the subway station 3 boys were dancing outside Consumer Food they set their huge radio down inside a grocery cart I was listening to the music and it was 11 o'clock I was watching the clouds part against the sky that was still blue that night as I turned the corner to my street inside one minute Liumped and terrified turned around a man came up beside me saying "sss sweetmama" and went inside a house he didn't touch me but where I live almost anything could happen El Salvador is farther away from here than anywhere I've ever been/but I wake sweating at 4 am where far away a heavy summer steam would otherwise rise above the hills/I dive below the guns blood chokes out the green and even the rocks from here they send one hundred and ten million more dollars from where I live and they could send enough to kill every single person there and maybe they will because almost anything could happen where I live

#### Ton Sourire Est Éblouissant

for S.F.

I wake from a dream of the train. a passing car casts bars of light and dark across the wall. There seems to be no going back, not to sleep, not to the ease of a train moving north toward the certainty of its destination. The changing light is what remains to mark the passage through night and day. I lie awake and listen to the small judgments of the clock, and hear the phrase in French repeat rising from the dream. Ton sourire, your smile. Think of departures, how we boarded a train to the city where we were born and all the places it took us instead. Departures, arrivals, scarred suitcases, languages we wear and shed like dresses, people whose lives we step in and out of with practiced agility, studied precision. I promise myself to forget nothing. but even the names mean less and less. Leaving the train, passengers fell into the arms of lovers, the loose knot of family, the doors of waiting taxis. Tonight my dreams are about trains, what I could tell you about your smile.

## Nancy Kricorian

## Identify Original Bond

On the nail over my desk hangs my press I.D. card.

Growing up everyone had always said I looked just like my father.

Now at thirty
I still have the features of my father's face but the expression of tired humor in this picture is my mother's.

I look like my mother.

Five months after her sixteenth birthday my mother gave birth to me.

A small boned girl lay on a metal table in labor while her friends were throwing out wilted corsages from their refrigerators, clumps of carnations and daisies that had matched pastel strapless formals.

Pictures of her holding me show a sixteen year old's small 95 pound frame leaning against a doorway holding a chubby dark-haired baby with a mixture of pain and love.

It's her rigid sixteen year old body in this picture cringing back toward a wall holding fear tightly in the small of her back huddling in a corner and holding her daughter against her body like children at the same birth.

# Donna Langston

## **CHERYL CLARKE**

#### Memorial Day

Memorial Day, day of death memory and picnics at cemeteries. Six pips unblinking through gravel and glass on a road linking the ring in my nose to the chain on your ankle quick of step, turn, veering, swerving unpredictably toward the bus. Me left squatting, drinking my own blood, choking, sweating, dryly blinking back the gnats from skeletons toxic with secrets. I camp in the bus station and watch awesome sun conjure variegation. They are used to me here, let me sleep, linger, cast my bones to conjure the clink of your ankle chain to where you ration your nights, lay your bracelets, necklace, and rings.

#### Andrée: An Ode

Only one of us will make you come.
Lead us in the dance.
Chances go round.
Don't make excuses.
Time is energy.
And no need to lie to the woman waiting in your room.
We're ambitious and generous, carry a wide pallet—the hard floor is good for the back, Andrée.
Make us welcome and take us home with you.

Don't think of lost or missed opportunities now.
Service delivery is our business.
Make a way for us to get in touch with you.
Or come to us tonight.
The door is open.
Watch us paint ourselves with our fingers

for you, Andrée. Choose the colors.

Embrace us.
Your breasts are gracious.
And so are we. Complaisant.
Renaissant.
Lips moist and dextrous.
No place too low or deep, Andrée.

Ask anything.
Make demands.
Be anything.
Our closets are full of costumes and accoutrements, Andrée.
Don't be reticent.

Or do nothing at all and take it all and dream rivers through it all, Andrée.

Wrap your legs around my legs. Then round my waist. Then, next, my legs around you. My legs round you. Position is poetry. But our orgasms are without metaphor. Lacking device. Syncopated. Real.

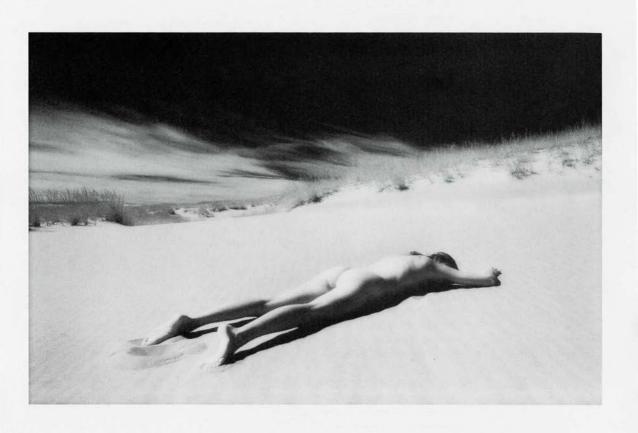
Don't think of conquest now, Andrée.
Or retreat or obligation.
One of us will make you come.
And one of us will watch.
The song mavis will wake you, Andrée, and you can flag the early train and ride.

#### i.

for me i want my body's freedom to rub my sex with the sex of others to protect the narrowness or breadth and danger of my own bed.

#### ii.

how much i do want you all the time for my self never out of my legs every night pushing between your thighs is relentless, infinite waking primordial nights without you dark is sorrowful mornings forgetful of dreams.



# Cynthia MacAdams photography



# America Was Christmas LINDA SMUKLER

We had always celebrated Christmas with presents and stockings in front of the fireplace, but this was the first year we had a tree. My friend Debbie told me that her mother said it was a bad thing to do, but some of the other Jewish kids in the neighborhood celebrated Christmas too. There was a fight going on in my school to have a celebration for Hannukah as well as Christmas since so many of the kids in the school were Jewish. My mother thought it was silly. After all, she said, the whole world had Christmas and America was Christmas not Hannukah.

My sister Sandra came out of her room and met me at the top of the stairs. Her head was bandaged in white from the operation, her black hair combed carefully behind. Her cheeks were bright pink above her pink robe. They had cut and sewn back her ears so they wouldn't stick out like they used to almost perpendicular from her head. My father's ears stuck out big from his head too, especially after he got a haircut, but Mom said it was o.k. for a man to have big ears. It seemed like everyone in the family was getting fixed. Last year at Christmas it was Mom and her black eyes from how they broke her nose to straighten out the hook she said made her look like a witch. Joanie, my little sister, had to wear shoes to bed with an iron bar between because they said she walked pigeon-toed. Even Tammy our german shepherd had her ears taped up to make them stand up straight. I always had to get my hair fixed. My mother would make me go to the beauty parlor once every two months to get it straightened and thinned because she said it was too big and frizzy. "You have the prettiest hair in the family when it's fixed up," she would say, but I didn't like the way it looked at all. I wanted to get it cut off altogether like Mary Martin in Peter Pan.

Sandra and I walked downstairs into the living room where the tree stood. Sandra plugged in the lights and the sudden white glare of them on the foil icicles lit up the inside of my hazy eyes. I didn't have my glasses and couldn't see well. The red and blue and gold ornaments were all new, not like the ornaments that were on Mary's tree next door. She told us that some of them had been on her great grandmother's tree. There were birds and bells and stars made of cloth and metal; the cloth was yellowed and the metal old and rusted. Our tree looked perfect like a magazine—tall and round and strung in white lights. Only the smell of it made me believe the tree had come from a forest somewhere into our living room. Since yesterday evening, presents had appeared under the tree and stockings nearby on the fireplace. I knew my parents had been up late. I had listened to the sounds of them whispering and cutting paper most of the night, and heard the

ice cubes rattling in my mother's scotch glass as she climbed the stairs for bed. No one talked about Santa Claus anymore except Ioanie, but my parents laid out our presents for us after we had gone to sleep like it was still a big secret where they came from.

We weren't allowed to touch anything. Not until both Mom and Dad were downstairs. We could hear someone moving upstairs. The toilet flushed and then we heard a thumping above our heads. It was Dad. Even today he was doing his exercises, the same exercises he would lead us at like he led his Y class. Hup two three fo. Hp to tree fo. And a right and a left and a right. Grunting and running in place in his white undershirt and shorts. With us across from him—"his girls," he called us—doing leg lifts and knee bends. Mom would be there in her sweatshirt and stretch pants and with curlers in her hair; her and Sandra puffing and complaining. And I would be there too, proud that I could do the most pushups and run the longest next to my father without getting tired. The exercises would go on for a long time until Sandra would start cutting up and acting like a clown. She would flail around and make fun of everyone including herself. I would start laughing and so would Mom. Dad would try to join in and half-heartedly play the clown himself, his mouth twisted all funny like he was doing something he didn't want to do. Watching him, I would suddenly feel caught and embarrassed, like I was the same as him, because I had been proud too.

The light was coming up and the room became harsh like a department store. All the foil presents and lights began to hurt my eyes as I tried to focus on them. "I'm going upstairs to get Mom and Dad's present," Sandra said. "Don't touch anything," she made sure to tell me. She walked out of the room and I was alone. Outside, it had begun to rain. We had wanted it to snow, but I didn't care. Christmas would make something magic happen no matter what. I crept up closer to the presents in order to see. Sandra—Joanie—Maurice—Sylvia—me—even Tammy and the cat had presents spread out under the tree. They were all sizes and shapes. I hoped I wouldn't get any clothes, not unless they could be some new jeans or a red flannel shirt like my father got last Christmas. Did I have as many gifts as Sandra had? I couldn't tell and got closer, looking too for the biggest boxes. "You're not supposed to touch anything!" Sandra was back. "I'm not touching anything," I said as I pulled away from the gifts. She ignored me and placed our parents' present under the tree. I could see her trying not to look but I knew she was just as curious as I was to know what was lying there under the branches.

Dad came down the stairs with Joanie whose eyes were big with excitement and anticipation. She immediately ran to the tree while my father called out "Good Morning girls" to us in his deep voice. "Merry Christmas," he said and came over and gave us a kiss and looked smiling into each of our eyes. "merry christmas" I mumbled back, trying to get away. Without my glasses, everything that close looked like I was seeing under a microscope. I could see every pore in my father's face, every inset black hair of his beard and tangled eyebrows. His yellow teeth were like a gate opening to let loose his thick tongue all red and moving and smelling of toothpaste. "Mom's just getting up," he said as he went into the kitchen to make coffee and orange juice. While he was gone I decided to go upstairs to get my glasses. I had had enough of the morning without them.

The door to my parents' bedroom was half open. I opened it wider and went in close to see my mother spread diagonally across the bed in her short nightgown. I could see her pale shoulders and arms thrown above her head and all the blue veins in the back of her legs. She was lying there completely relaxed as if she was happy to have the bed to herself for once. "Mom?" She grunted. "Mom, we're all waiting for you." She mumbled that she would be right down and turned over, burying her head under the pillow. I knew she didn't want to get up. I went into my room to get my glasses. As soon as I put them on the colors in the room got brighter and the sound of the rain outside got quieter. I went back downstairs. In focus now, the tree and the living room and everyone in it seemed smaller. I told my father that Mom was still asleep.

My father said o.k. and looked at the three of us. I could see that he was mad and was trying to think of something to say. After a minute or so he blurted out, "Well girls, what does Christmas mean to you?" I sat on my hands while Sandra started to tell him the right answer. She told us what her teacher said in school and what her Weekly Reader said, and that to her Christmas was all about love and family. My father sat across from her nodding his head. Joanie was over at the tree grabbing at a present. My father went over and picked her up. "We have to wait sweetheart," he told her. She pushed away from him and tried to get down. He set her firmly on the couch and said, "Joanie NO!" She started to cry but my father ignored her and sat down heavily in the chair across from us. He looked over at me and began to ask what I thought Christmas meant, but at that moment Mom finally came down the stairs and saved me from having to say anything. She had a smile on her face and said "Good Morning" without any apology. She was all concerned about what was wrong with Joanie. My father tried to look like he wasn't angry and said, "Good. Now we can begin." Mom said "In a minute" and went into the kitchen, taking Joanie with her. Dad's mouth formed into a crooked smile. Mom called to Sandra from the hallway. "Did you take your medicine?" Sandra looked uncomfortable and quietly said yes. I knew she hadn't taken it. My father asked her again if she took it. She screamed "yes!" at him. "Don't you talk to me that way young lady." he said to her. I thought he was going to jump on her. "I'm sorry," she mumbled without pulling away. Dad sighed and dropped the subject. He got up and went over to the phonograph to put on a record. Suddenly Joan Sutherland's thick opera voice, singing Jingle Bells, filled the room. We heard my mother call out something from the kitchen. "What?" My father turned the record down to hear her. "Did you feed the animals?" "Yes dear!" he shouted back. "Everything's been done except for you being here." He turned the record back up, even louder this time. Mom came into the living room. "Could we turn that down?" she asked. Her eyes stared right through my father. "Of course dear," he said through his teeth. "Right away."

Mom was carrying two bloody Mary's and a cigarette for herself. "Would you like one?" She held out one of the drinks to my father. He took it and said "I thought you were going to stop with those things," meaning the cigarettes. "Maurice, not now," she replied in a voice that allowed no discussion. My father took a deep breath and said, "Well, can we all relax and begin?" Mom sat down and we began to open the presents one by one. "You go first," Sandra said to Mom and Dad. I had written the note for our parents last Christmas, so it was Sandra's

turn this year. "To Mom and Dad," it said in her large and open-lettered script. "For being wonderful examples to us. As your daughters, we look up to you. We hope our lives can be as full and rich as you have shown us your lives to be. Love, your three daughters, who are your loving friends." We had all signed the card at the bottom. "That's very sweet," my mother said. Dad came over and kissed each of us on the lips. Their present was a big book about Rembrandt we had bought for them with our allowances and some money they had given us just for that purpose. After they opened it we all got kissed again.

We went around and around the circle. Joanie was impatient even though, being the youngest, she had the most turns and presents. She got a baby doll dressed in ruffled panties, a Dr. Seuss, a stuffed lamb, two dresses, and new black and white saddleshoes to wear at night with her iron bar. She frowned at them and said she didn't want to wear shoes to bed anymore. My mother tried to comfort her and promised that the shoes would feel so good Joanie wouldn't know she had them on. Joanie first looked like she didn't believe her, but seemed to forget all about it for her new doll who she said would wear shoes to bed too.

Sandra was oohing over a yellow dress and a white slip and a pair of Madame Alexander dolls, a matching boy and girl in Russian peasant costumes. My mother gave my father a book about John Kennedy, a blue plaid shirt with a matching tie, and a leather overnight bag. He gave her a big silver necklace that looked like a bear claw.

I opened my boxes. At first there was a wool pleated skirt, then a pink sweater to go with it. Then there were tights and gloves and a wool hat with a ball on top. My heart was beating fast as I tried to ooh and ahh like Sandra and Joanie, thinking if I showed I was happy like them, I would be. My father reached over under the tree and pulled out my big present. There was always one 'big' present for each of us which we opened last. This present came in a square heavy box, much wider than it was deep. My note from them was on it. I opened it first. The card was a reproduction of a painting of some mountains covered in fog. My mother said it was Japanese. I opened it to my father's handwriting. It was my father who always wrote the notes to us, never Mom. "To our beautiful first daughter," it said, "who gets more lovely every year. Who is our scholar, and whose mind has managed to teach us all. Love, Mom and Dad." I said thank you and felt my ears burning. How was I the scholar? Sandra got better grades than me in school. I smiled and thanked them and tore apart the wrapping on my present, opening the lid. There were books—a whole encyclopedia of science—five volumes worth. I felt better. I liked science. I went over and hugged Mom and Dad and sat back down. I wished that my present had been the last so it would all be over, but Ioanie was next. She opened her final gift and was ecstatic over a complete miniature China teaset. And then came Sandra. "It's my turn?" she asked. My father smiled and handed her a large box that was even bigger than the one I got. She clapped her hands and opened her note. "To our daughter Sandra," she read out loud, "whose talent and laughter make our days more joyful and surprising than she could ever know. To feed your romantic mind and your far reaching thoughts, the best music in the world." When she finished reading, she closed her eyes for a minute then unwrapped her gift very carefully, making sure not to tear any of the paper. She reached into the box and slowly took out; one, two, Sandburg, Haiku, Three, four, Eliot, Roethke, Frost. Whitman, I knew him. Cummings I knew. Six, seven, eight, Yeats I knew. Emily Dickinson, who was she? Sandra said, "Oh boy." So I was the scholar, and Sandra? "To our Poetess," the inscription in each of the books said, "Our Poetess. Merry Christmas. Love, Mom and Dad." Dickinsoncummingsyeats—I chanted to myself and took off my glasses. "Oh thank you, thank you," Sandra exclaimed. She went over and threw her arms around Mom and Dad, while I sat, not knowing why I was holding myself and the tears back in my eyes.

"A Toast!" my father's voice rang out as he held his Bloody Mary in front of him and held Sandra at the same time. Sandra and Joanie and Mom reached over and raised their glasses with him. My arm felt heavy as I lifted my glass to join them. We watched as he took an index card out of his breast pocket. "I want to celebrate," my father read, "To take the time to think about this holiday and what it means to all of us. As Sandra was saying so beautifully to us before, this is a holiday about love and family." He looked up and smiled at her. Sandra smiled back and her cheeks turned all puffy in front of her bandages. Dad went on. "Last night I was thinking about Christ, not as a God, but as a man. What he stood for as a man. It is his life that we, even as lews, celebrate today. Not the religion that came out of his life, but what his life has to do with all civilization. Christ. His humanity. Yes, the greatness of his humanity. A life that never fails to show us, no matter what our religion, the infinite possibilities of human achievement and of Mankind and of universal good will to fellow man. Where it is written that Christ walked on the water, which I doubt ever happened, is a metaphor." He looked up again, this time at me, and asked, "Do you know what a metaphor is?" I was caught by surprise. My face red, I told him that a metaphor was when you said something was something else, like a comparison. I wasn't sure how Christ walking on the water was a metaphor and got scared that my definition was wrong. Maybe it was a simile. I tried to remember the difference we had learned at school but it didn't seem to matter. Dad smiled at me and said "Very Good" and that Christ was a metaphor for all that was good and human in us. That he was someone to live up to and that people all over the world put their problems away for this day in celebration of his birthday. At which point, he raised his glass and said, "To Christ and Christmas, and us. I love you." Sandra threw her arms around him. "I love you Daddy." Mom said, "That was beautiful." "O.K.," Dad said. He was almost crying. "Let's go eat something." I hardly heard him as I sat crumpled back on the couch looking out at Sandra's books across the room. "Didn't you have a good Christmas?" my father suddenly asked. They were all staring at me. I immediately sat up and put on my glasses. "I had a good Christmas," I said, trying to sound convincing. My father got up and went over to the record player. He turned the sound back up and out came loan again, singing "Ave Maria" at the top of her voice. It was my father's favorite song on the record and he made everyone stop to listen as she sang the high, high A at the end, which for him, at that moment, took its place among the most miraculous events in the world.



١.

"If you can't touch it, it ain't real," the old man says, fingering his beard. He doesn't believe in insanity or peace. I'm not sure what I believe and remember that doubting Thomas was my favorite Bible story. I reach for your hands to see if they are whole.

11.

Reality

is as hard to pin down as a politician or an angry kid. It is neither one thing or another. It is everything: your mother's death; the jalapeño pepper surprising you underneath the sausage; a heavy blanket of snow wrapped around the earth like a muffler; your body arched, a monument to passion; a creaky floorboard; a piece

of snow wrapped around the earth like a muffler; your body arched, a monument to passion; a creaky floorboard; a piece of buttered black bread. I collect these fragments, though some I lose like phone numbers, notes to myself, or someone's mind.

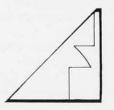
Others change shape, texture like shards of glass in the sand under waves.

And I can't decide if, when I put them together, they will make a puzzle or a quilt.

III.

I read somewhere once that reality is the reflection of our thoughts, our selves, off of someone else—without mirrors, lakes, and lovers' faces we might not know who we are.

But I don't trust the astigmatism in my eye, the tricks of light, the distortions in the wavering air. My hands always know the truth, like taproots moving surely and deep through the soil. I let them search for what we need to know.



#### **YOLANDA BLANCO**

## **Six Poems**

### WOMEN'S THINGS

I was a happy girl a wildflower no penis envy no "electras" on my back I was a confident child But I had to grow up to find out about "women's things" coffee cups, fears, "must nots . . ." dainty handkerchiefs and embroidery and I learned to cry and my buttocks matured "Make sons, not books," I was told "Procreate, don't create." I found out then that: "Men don't make passes at girls who wear glasses." And I gave in. And here I am between "Good morning, my love," shorthand notebooks and dirty dishes in the kitchen. aivina life, but not livina Here I am, a satisfied mother deaf to the thousands who die in my country aborting Respected citizen, I spit at children who have only their mother's last name In the end I'm the dummy Letting others speak for me Rather than speaking for myself

Being myself

### COSAS DE MUJER

Fui de niña feliz creciendo silvestre en mi sexo sin envidias de penes sin electras en mi espalda Fui sabia en infancia pero hube de crecer y supe de "cosas de mujeres," tacitas de café, miedos, no debes pañuelos y bordados Y aprendí a llorar y eché nalgas. "Haz hijos pero no libros—se me dijo— Cria en vez de crear." Supe entonces que "mujer que sabe latin ni consique marido ni tiene buen fin." Y asenti. Y aqui estov dando vida sin vivir entre buenos días mi amor libretas de taquigrafía y trastes sucios en la cocina Madre satisfecha aquí estoy sorda a las miles de abortantes que mueren en el país. Cumplida ciudadana escupo a los niños que soló llevan el apellido de la madre. En fin soy la entumecida dejándome hablar a cambio de hablarles v ser.

#### **HABITATION**

Various spirits reside in me, many bodies inhabit me
There are those who call me: abyss
Others claim parity.
See the house of my body
See the body of my house with ample doors and windows;
roof, eaves, shawl, nest or hammock;
House, hostel, or cave, labial or lancet house
For four hundred children a lodge, a shelter
Spirit, desire and doubt populate me

I must add: estrogen and warm moods balance the bittersweet of my inner rooms:

Inhabit them

#### **APOSENTOS**

Varios ánimos me habitan, a muchos cuerpos aposento. Hay quienes les dicen abismo paridad dicen cuantos: Ver la casa de mi cuerpo ver el cuerpo de mi casa con amplias puertas y ventanas; techo, alero, cobija, nidal o hamaca; casa albergue o caverna, casa labio o espada; de cuatrocientos hijos hospedaje, posada De espíritu y ansias y dudas, poblándome.

Debo decir que hubo estrógenos y humores cálidos, balanceando el acidulce de mis aposentos:

Habitarlos

#### INITIATION

And I was given this prayer to be said only during the hours of bleeding:

I learn from menses
Forge my contiguity with the moon
From the ubiquitous earth
I draw my strength

I know month to month there is a child who dreams me

#### INICIACIÓN

Y me dio esta oración para decirla tan sólo a las horas de la sangre:

Aprendo del menstruo Forjo mi contiguidad con la luna De la ubicua tierra arranco mi fuerza

Sé que mes a mes hay un hijo que me sueña.

#### **WRINKLES**

There are wrinkles on my forehead now caused by years deceit tedium

Being female

Wrinkles taunting me: old woman stale fruit Puckering my breasts cracking my kisses beckoning me towards emptiness shouting at me:

Shut up!

Menopausal wrinkles

So what if my skin shrivels my sex ages

I still flower

Compañera Friend

#### **ARRUGAS**

Hay arrugas en mi frente ahora Son del tiempo Del dolo Del tedio

De hembra son.

Son arrugas como diciéndome vieja una fruta pasada como quebrando mis senos como frunciéndome el beso llamándome hacia nada gritándome cállate

Son arrugas menopáusicas Mas

si marchitada hembra florezco amiga

Si envejecida mujer

entonces:

compañera.

#### **MENOPAUSE**

There will be no eclipse of the moon
There will be no full moon, no waning moon
No fluxuation of moods

no moon of bleeding or metaphorical gestures,

different yesterday

0

from tomorrow from this afternoon.

Already it will come no more this pygmalion of change metamorphizing your terrain:

It will come no more the menstrual moon

#### MENOPAUSIA

No habrá eclipse de luna No habrá plenilunio, ni luna menguante Ni fluio de humores

ni luna de sangre

o gesto metáfora,

distinto de ayer de mañana

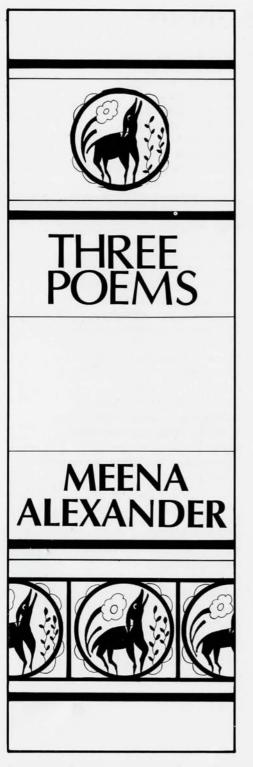
del de esta tarde.

No vendrá ya el pigmalión del cambio metamorfoseando tus terredades:

No vendrá más la fase de luna menstruante.

#### **YOLANDA BLANCO**

(Trans: Susan Sherman)



#### Fragment: The River Bed

They are going, all going over the hill, the tall man and lame the drunk man and stout the leper with his bell the brahmin and pariah in my country of palm trees gripped by the sun, roots of tapioca and the wild hyacinth crawling on water.

After the cobra bludgeoned to death after the death cry of the mongoose I wandered on by the river's edge hair beaten back by monsoon winds, unknowing, scarcely seven-

they lay there padlocked in dream the lovers, black hair knotted to their skulls river mud bubbling over them mouths parted, nails dark with rust biting into flesh those absolute markings of desire.

Legs grappled legs as the river mites turned their blood red bottoms to the sun and gorgeous nipples flecked with foam, rose and sank. I saw their clothing borne by a stiff wind collapsing like sails.

#### Fragment: The Sea-Shore

The telegram was scribbled out on paper
I recognised her hand
'Quickly come the heart wastes.
I raced through the walls of a two-bedroom flat onto the shore of the Arabian Sea

In minute coves the curlew cries water knocks at my thigh a blued glass bit lashed by salt a toothless comb I watch my parts distinct, scratched by the tide freeing slowly of blood's knot.

Then women gather eyes tucked into breasts like slow seabirds saris dragged over whitening hair

They scoop their hands from soft pumice they squat by the water's brink still keening: a low female moan the herons mark and ponder upright on their blackening claws as blunt waves lash the Southern sky at dawn.

Bite of dark flesh susurrus of nipple the quick corrugation of desire a swelling in the mouth a satisfaction binding the knot that must not fray. I knew I could not stay.

I wept salt
I was a cut seaweed
stalk ripped into shreds
burying my face
in a wind-blown lap
half earth, half woman.
Rough sand coated my tongue
and my body weightless, eased
into birth as a conch-shell darts
water, still whispering, lung, nostril
and mouth lulled as I circled in blackness

shorn of sight a night I first tasted in her sap. She who bore me whose death I dreamt is a sharp star locked in passage in its own inviolable flash a sovereign, blinding light. What was she to those women keening?

Furrow packed with mud sore hands split root burning on this southern shore at dawn, I listened to a voice among them cry: 'She lives, she is absolute in you.' So my flesh dropped into heat heaving, as if rust gripped a metal pot sucking it inwards

I saw a blood
red crab
a tortured starfish
form and deform in water.
I was half woman
half daughter
held in a spin-drift light
as the clouds burst
and a solitary heron
paced with outstretched claws.

#### **Election Days**

The bathhouse walls are plastered white the tub of brass crusted with black from dried out twigs burnt for hot water

Snub nose dark full cheeks a six year child is staring into water, light breaks off and splinters in her eyes her face divides

An inhuman cry just before dawn cuts the bathhouse wall, is it a lone bird crying as night spills from the western coast?

She holds her ears she cannot turn so swiftly does the cut worm burn, the ancient cock crows twice:

Election day slow drumbeats a single trumpet call feet marching to the local police station, behind the bars someone's son is dying. Still not breakfast time
Narayan the cook
sixty years old
not grey
peeling grapes
for Marya the maid
(she swallows them whole)
squats on the kitchen steps
his teeth are red

He turns the heavy stone and rice paste bubbles. She hears of ballot boxes dropped in a pond a woman with her blouse torn off, men armed with sickles in the paddy fields: 'Congress rogues not Communists...

His voice trails off as Paulos the fisherman lean as a rake hands all bloodied with fish stuff leans forward and explains: 'They said they would crush my tongue if I spoke'

In his nails she sees scales of the parrot fish, a turquoise radiance torn from the sea, she wipes her eyes she crouches into a ball tight in the dirt where the butterflies crawl.

MEENA ALEXANDER

# PAULA ROSS Memory/Sound: Coming Language

(From a Novel-in-Progress)

NOTE: This excerpt takes place a year after Ida, the main character, meets Ollie. The action begins a few days after Ida arrives in Tyler, a small town in the South. Ida's mother, Louise, who shared a duplex in Tyler with Ollie, has just died. The two other major characters in this excerpt, Viola and Evelyn, are friends of Ida's from childhood. Ida, Viola and Evelyn all grew up together in Tyler but now live in New York City. Lancie, referred to in the first section, is a woman with whom Ida was in love in the early '60s, shortly after she moved to New York.

They touched. The first time, they really touched, Ollie and Ida. Not polite hugs. Not proper pats on the hand. Touching, their skin feeling no space between them, moving into each other's touch and Ida remembered. She remembered soft, tender skin next to hers, the trust of nestled body sinking into her arms it had been so long since she'd been touched had felt that skimming over silken skin so cool at first so cool to her fingers which could not stop touching, which drew her deeper into the silk of coolness no longer cool but molten sinking deeper fire burning her fingers no more fingers no more skimming sinking falling Ollie touching Ollie touching Ida no more Ida Ida crying who's crying who's touching tears who cries tears spilling falling from the sinking into tears cry out It doesn't matter Nothing matters I love you, crying, I love you sinking next to me in me sinking deeper the tears won't stop can't stop falling it doesn't matter you touched me nothing matters I love you next to me we didn't mean it we touched we fell nothing matters OH GOD I LOVE HER we didn't mean it we touched it's so cool her skin so cool like satin ribbons on my braids ribbons Louise tied on my braids on Sunday mornings Oh God, my mother, Louise, we didn't mean it Louise is dead I love you Ollie I love you Ollie . . . .

"Honey? Ida, honey, wake up. You been dreamin'? It's O.K. Everything's all right. It's O.K."

Ida felt it slip quietly away. She heard Ollie's voice as she watched behind her eyes the dream give way to the real touch of Ollie's hand on her shoulder, gently shaking her. She wanted to scream, "No! You can't make it leave. You can't. If I come back, you'll be gone. Bring back the dream, please bring me back. Please. Don't leave. Please." Gone. The morning light pushed at her.

Are all dreams afraid of the light? She'll be gone. She is gone. Louise is dead, my mother. I bury my mother today in the light and she'll be gone, in the light I can't look at

you Ollie, the light has taken you away you went away like Lancie I loved her we talked into the night in that little crowded room I stumbled over her shoes and we giggled and waited to see who heard, no sound, so we sat on the bed and I rubbed her feet, her poor dancer's feet. And she read my plays, she said I was good she said I danced with words we talked no one to talk to since Lancie Lancie's gone the light killed our talking we only danced I rubbed her feet the light killed Lancie she had to dance they told her she couldn't dance with me, she cried, afraid in the light, afraid they'd see in the light that I loved her see in the light that words danced that she danced for me.

"Oh, Ida, people are saying we're funny. Ida, I don't want to be funny. I'm afraid. I can't dance when I'm afraid. You can't dance with me anymore, they'll say you're

funny." Queer. Mannish.

"I can't dance with you anymore, Ida. God, Ida!" And she left. With a man, kind of

womanish they said. A dancer, they said, but at least a man. Lancie, lost.

"Don't you want something to eat before they come to drive us to the church? You haven't had anything since breakfast yesterday. You've gotta eat, honey." Ollie held out a long, well-worn bathrobe. Head down, Ida reached for it, eyes suddenly full of the pink and white clusters of flowers on her nightgown. Who opened her eyes? When had she opened them to see Ollie, gone, but standing there, talking to her, watching her with that look holding something back and Ida was afraid to know what it was. Louise, dead. She slipped one arm into the robe sleeve. Louise. Gone, like Lancie. The other arm. Tie the belt. She stood up, feet searching for her houseslippers. Shuffle into them. Look at Ollie. LOOK at her. But not behind the eyes. She couldn't look behind those eyes. It was light, morning. Louise was dead. She must wait. She knew, behind those eyes, Ollie too waited.

"I guess I am hungry," she said. "It'll do me good to get up and moving around again." She wanted to touch Ollie's arm. "I know it's been hard for you too, these last few days. You take it easy now. I'll put on the coffee and scramble some of those eggs the pastor's wife brought over last night. You want toast? Preserves?" She was half way to the kitchen.

Ollie smoothed the rumpled sheets and began pulling up the sparkling white chenille bedspread. She straightened up, staring absently at its bumpy pattern.

"Sure, honey," she called out. "I'll have whatever you feel like fixing." She gave the bed a final pat. She closed the door behind her. She had forgotten to plump the pillows.

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The curtains fluttered in the night wind. Leaves murmured to each other, brushing against the side of the house, rustling comfortably, settling into restfulness. Ida watched from the bed Ollie's steady stitching: needle, thread, needle, thread, moving in and out of a stiff linen rectangle. The lamp on the small oak table lit only a small circle around her; and Ida watched from the shadows.

"Think this will make a pretty coverlet for that stool I've got in the shop?" She held up the cloth. Ida could just barely make out the outline of a basket.

"Course, all I do is rest my foot on it all day while I'm working. I must've worn out one of these covers every coupla years." She knotted the thread, picked an-

other color from the tangled pile on the table and squinted, lining up the silky, shiny strands with the needle's eye. The tip of her tongue appeared.

"You know my friend, Viola Green, don't you?"

The tip of Ollie's tongue now disappeared as she contentedly pulled the thread through. "Viola Sutton Green? Lived over on Cypress Street? Yeah, I know her. She's your neighbor up in New York, isn't she?"

"She lives next door. Runs Tiny's, the corner store." Ida reached for the glass of water on the bedside table. "She told me you were married once." The water was

lukewarm.

Not so fast, these stitches. Heavier thread. She's in a circle of light. Lamp light. Soft, like leaves rustling.

Ollie looked up. "What did she tell you that for?"

"I don't know except that before I left last week, I told her about how good you'd been to Mama. How you used to write me after Mama couldn't anymore. And if you know Viola, you know she knows everybody who's ever been in Tyler." Ida sat up straighter. The bathrobe hung at the foot of the bed. The breeze played up and down on her bare arms, making her shiver. And she watched Ollie sewing.

In the space of her heart beating, words tumbled out and rolled across the floor, lapping at Ollie's feet, receding, rushing, pulling back, pushing, surrounding her, covering the circle of the lamp's light. She couldn't stop asking, probing, like the needle in the linen, piercing. Lancie, lost. Talking to Lancie? No, to Ollie. Talking, pushing, she wanted to know, everything, the words left her and moved into the circle of light, she couldn't stop them she wanted to know, everything, she could hear the words, moving, moving her, she could see them, in the light, Ollie, in the light Lancie lost but she wanted to know everything she had to look in the light at her words, her wanting, her wanting to know Ollie not a dream, the light on the words, she couldn't take them back, didn't want them back only knowing what was behind those words those eyes her eyes which looked which watched the circle, the words in the circle won't come back she'll know behind those eyes how can she know Lancie lost it's wrong how can she know I know everything is lost I've stepped outside the circle is lost is wrong the circle is safe as long as the words come back don't answer I don't want to know, everything is lost, in the light, don't answer don't.

"That was a long time ago. I was just a girl." Ollie's hands were still now, resting quietly in her lap. The light fell like a knife, dividing her hand in half, dark against the light. "He went off. Joined the Army. They killed him in boot camp. Nothing but a boy." And Ollie looked at Ida sitting in her bed, wearing the nightgown

she'd never worn. Too fancy, all that lace.

"But everybody gets married, one time or another. Well," she stopped, "almost everybody." She looked at Ida's face, at the pain of not asking, not knowing, afraid. She picked up the piece of linen again, the needle, the thread, the stitches began to come once more.

"I haven't thought about that in years," she said. Then, "I did love him. As

much as a girl can know what that means. But that's years gone."

Lancie, lost. Boy, husband, gone. Words in the light won't come back they won't come back they killed Lancie in the light I want to know everything.

And in the space of her heart beating

Ollie stood up, put the coverlet on the chair, stuck the needle in a pincushion and turned out the light. Her bare feet made no sound on the carpet. Ida felt herself breathing like the leaves whispering. She heard the soft slushing sound of Ollie's robe and gown, falling to the floor, felt the dip of the bed and the whole room seemed nothing but air. Ollie, her hands hovering nervously, touched the edges of Ida's nightgown: all that lace. Ida moved slightly, her shoulders barely shrugging and the wide lace straps slipped off. She reached for Ollie's hands and the pink and white flowered gown fell to her waist. Ollie closed her eyes, turned her head. And Ida, breathing like leaves murmuring, brought her hands to Ollie's face, leaned into the warm, tentative smell of her, turned Ollie's head back to face her, and opened Ollie's mouth with her own.

The wind blew through the window across her back. Gently, she pulled away just long enough to slide Ollie beneath the sheets, down beside her. They moved into each other, touching, curling around the look behind Ollie's eyes, beyond

Ida's words.

Touch won't go away. Words can't come back. Lancie, I love her.

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"Where're the children?" Evelyn demanded as Viola let her in the front door and they made their way through the darkened store.

"Sugar's got her head stuck in a book upstairs and Vincie's probably on the phone in the kitchen." She turned around and peered back through the beaded curtain. Evelyn's figure was barely visible in the gloom.

"What," Viola called to the dim, bulky shape, "are you just standing there for?"

"Maybe we ought to talk out here?" Evelyn murmured.

"Talk about what?" The last word came out in an undertone. "And why are we whispering?" she hissed, feeling silly.

Evelyn didn't say anything. Then, "When's the last time you talked with Ida?"

Viola's heart gave a sudden lurch. Footsteps going upstairs.

"'Night Mama. 'Night Evelyn."

Viola opened her mouth. Nothing came out. Neither woman moved. Finally: "Night, Vincie." from Viola. "Good night, child." Evelyn sounded a little indignant. Vincie hadn't even *pretended* not to hear them.

"Vincie? Did you lock the back door?"

"Oh, Mama! Yes! It's locked! Boy!" More footsteps. Quiet.

"Come on in here, Evelyn. I think they're up for the night." Viola slowly lowered herself into the rocking chair by the couch. Evelyn followed, settling in among the sofa pillows. Viola picked up her knitting and played absently with the yarn. Water was running upstairs. She'll use all of it, thought Viola, as usual.

"Myself, I think she's crazy. Or sick," Evelyn blurted out.

After a minute, during which they could hear a toilet flush, Viola said, "I suppose."

"You suppose?" Evelyn gave an enormous snort. "Suppose nothing. I never

heard of such nonsense. She's old enough to know better."

Viola lifted an eyebrow. "You never heard? Now, Evelyn, you haven't lived in New York for 20 years without . . ."

"It's not right." Evelyn folded her arms across her chest. Her mouth was stiff, hard. The corners began to tremble.

Viola sighed. "Well, right or not, she seems bound and determined to do it." "Huh! Maybe she's going through the change early. They say that can make you crazy. And her Mama dyin' and all." Evelyn seemed to sink further into the unresisting pillows. "What are we gonna do?"

"What do you mean, what are we gonna do? She's a grown woman. We can't

stop her from doing anything she wants to do."

Evelyn sat up abruptly. Viola thought she was going to propel her huge body

straight at her, like a ball out of a cannon.

"Don't you care what happens to her?" Evelyn said, the anguish and the anger colliding in her voice. "Don't you care what people are going to say? I mean, the way she is now, she's likely to tell everybody, not just you and me!" She collapsed back against the pillows again. Viola thought to herself, "She's going to have a devil of a time getting up off that couch. I don't know why she won't sit in a chair." If Ida were here, she'd say, "Oh, leave her alone, girl. You know how she is." You know.

I love her. We're lovers.
What's his name?
He doesn't have a name.
When do we get to meet him?
We're lovers.
She'd want you to be happy.
I love her.
It can't be that bad.
We're lovers.
You can tell me.
I love her.

Evelyn continued to fuss. "If she's going to act like she's got no sense, the least she can do is keep it to herself. Miss Louise must be spinning in her grave, do you hear me? Not turning. Spinning! I mean, we all act a fool sometimes, but that don't mean we got to put it all out in the street for every Tom, Dick and Harry to snigger at!"

hold back for her wouldn't want you to not now

"I know, Evelyn. I know. I can't hardly believe it myself. But she's been alone a

long time. Maybe . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Maybe, my foot! It's an abomination. That's what the Bible says. An abomination in the eyes of the Lord. Lots of folks are alone. I am. You are. Well, you have the girls, but you know what I mean. Some of us just ain't gonna make it to the ark two by two. We just have to make it in the best way we know how. Just have to deal with it."

Viola closed her eyes. Deal with it. With sleeping in the middle of the bed because there's no reason, no body not to. Deal with the feeling that you've become invisible because there's no sense of touching or holding anymore. Deal with the fear that love gives no second chances—If you miss it the first time, or it's cut

short, that's it. Sorry, lady, one to a customer. The deal is that I look at men now, good, kind, and know that they're not Jake. Know I couldn't have for them that rushing, trembling kind of feeling I had for him. Or maybe I could. Maybe that's the problem. It scares me, that and the loneliness, the possibility that it might end. Yes, she opened her eyes, we're all alone. And we deal with it in whatever way we can.

"Do you think she's been sneakin' off to those funny clubs and bars all these years and we never knew it?" Evelyn looked at Viola with an accusing stare, intrigued by the idea.

"Oh, Evelyn! Now you're talkin' like you don't have good sense. I doubt Ida's

ever been inside any kind of bar in her life, funny or otherwise."

Evelyn shifted her weight, lifting one solid leg up on the couch. "Now that just shows how much you know," she said with some amount of satisfaction. "She went to all kinds of places when she was messin' around with that theatre crowd and those acting folks years ago, before she moved from downtown. She used to tell me she liked to watch people. Well, maybe she was doin' more than just watchin'."

Viola's head ached. "Evelyn, I can't let you say things like that about Ida

Martha. I don't care what she's done."

Excuse me, honey, but I call what I see what it is.

Evelyn fixed Viola with a gaze both guileless and knowing. "Well, just what is it you think she *does* do, woman? Hold hands?"

She picked up Ida's hands in her own She held them tightly She asked, over and over

"Makes me sick, myself, just sick." Another snort. Shuddering shoulders, her head now turned away from the pleading look in Viola's eyes. She had tried. To make herself think of Ida like "that." She couldn't. It just didn't work. And now, in her blunt, rough way, Evelyn had opened every door Viola had attempted to keep so tightly shut. At that instant, Viola hated her.

Well, just what is it you think she does do?

They did, she and Jake, together. Quick. Young. Hungry. Quick and hungry her mother carefully shaking out the wedding dress, carefully not looking at her eldest daughter, about to marry.

"Certain things you do, as a wife, a good woman. I think he loves you. But men have their own needs. If he don't get it met with you, don't mean he'll go without.

You want to keep him, you remember that."

Keep him. Was that what it had all meant, "keeping" him? She had known to do only what her body felt—a kind of welcoming, a reaching out for that moment of taking in, the first shock, each time, of being split apart but then immediately coming back together, around him. The shouts, the cries, the whimpers, even the tears. Was that "keeping him?" All those things seemed to come only from who she was, herself, when they loved.

At first, before the girls came, it had been enough to meet in that quick and urgent way, all their attention focused on that moment when his sounds filled her ears as fully as she felt him inside her. And gradually, almost without them noticing, they found hours on either side of those seconds. If anything kept him with her, and her with him, it was that discovery. And only because they had made it together. Once, soon after Jake died, she had tried to explain it to Evelyn.

"Sure, I miss that. I won't lie and say I don't. But that's not what makes me ache and cry at night. No, it sure isn't what makes me cry." They'd been here, sitting in this same room, looking at each other from the same places—Evelyn sunk into the couch, Viola rocking in the rocking chair. "More," she'd said then, "I miss somebody touching my hair, squeezing me around my waist. Or just kissing my cheek like it was the softest thing in the world."

like it was the softest thing in the world."
And Evelyn had sniffed and shrugged.

"Well, I guess you can afford to miss the little stuff when you've had some that's not so little."

Viola changed the subject.

And now, to think of Ida being touched. Touched. Touching. In that way. But what way? The "little stuff," as Evelyn put it? A kiss? A hug? But they all kissed and hugged most of their women friends. So what did that mean? Women touched each other, their children. Touching was not why Ida was moving back to Tyler. Not that kind of touching. Was not what had filled the car that rainy afternoon.

Lovers

It can't be that bad. He doesn't have a name

Another woman's touch could *not* be it. Could it? Her own, the feel of her own skin, her own body? What if the reaching out met a softness like that, a pattern of round and curve? Meeting herself? But why? It was not herself she needed to know. Or wanted. Repetitious? Pointless? Redundant? Redundant. Yes. Excess. Too much. Of a good thing. And who would be who? How would you know who you were? And why? Impossible.

"... made us different for a reason." Evelyn was saying. "It's not our place to

switch things around. Not our place."

Without really thinking, Viola shot back, "Well, some folks think your place, my place, Ida's, anybody's place who isn't white, to be some place else. So I don't know about 'our place,' Evelyn."

"The Lord don't love those who blaspheme, Viola. Besides, it doesn't matter how much power and money they've got, white folks' plans ain't got nothin' to do with His."

"Maybe not, but you'd never know it to look around."

Evelyn let a smile start to creep onto her face. "Well, girl, you sure are right about that."

So they sat, silent, home girls, Up South, listening to the sounds of the night city.

# Kathleen Shaye Hill GOING A.W.O.L.

It seemed the funeral would never end. Friends were even more generous than they had been for the others—the feast was huge.

Rainee kept waiting for something to happen—if not a bolt of lightning, then some small spark to fly that would set this moment apart from all others.

It was a fruitless wait. This funeral, except for length, was not much different from any of the others held out here for the past several generations. To Rainee's disdain, she found even the thoughts in her own mind indistinguishable from the thoughts that might occupy it on any other day. The whole day she'd been ashamedly aware of the trivial. Too aware of whose children were bored or crying. Too aware of Mary Tyker's smeared purple-red lipstick and Jake Johnson's wine-stained trousers. Too aware of how, as each man had taken his turn at the shovel, he had been ever-so-careful, reverent even, in making sure that the earth was tucked tightly around each of the three.

Every so often she'd look around and see if Tanya had shown up yet. Until the last shovelful of soil was replaced, Rainee expected to see her. It was almost unbelievable that of all those she'd loved, the only one left should be vacationing hun-

dreds of miles away right now.

When it was over and all the rest of them had headed back to the meeting house Rainee climbed into Johnny's '49 truck. She kicked off her shoes, peeled her hose off, and turned the radio on full-blast to her favorite country-western station. She couldn't help thinking that music sure was different these days—the only ones staying afloat seem to be those who could straddle the gap, going awol occasionally to pay dues to the pop charts.

Rainee took the pins out of her hair and let it fall to rest on her shoulders, then lay back across the seat with her feet dangling out of the window. The clear of the sky was quickly disappearing and the murky blue color hanging over the tips of

the ponderosa pine told her the day was nearly gone.

Well, it was time for her to go, too. She sat up and got the truck started, then drove down the road, carefully avoiding each pothole. She stopped once more, just long enough to caress the ground over Marie and Michael. Almost long enough for a lone tear to fall. She left just in time.

That was one of Johnny's rules: Indian women don't cry.

The way she slammed the door as she climbed into the truck told her that it was all catching up with her. Funny the way a person had to depend on signals like that at the most important moments.

She put the truck in gear and tore down the road—this time bouncing mightily from one chuckhole to another, leaving frantic red clouds of pumice dust to settle on bewildered chipmunks who only seconds before had scampered from her path. Harder and faster she drove, barely making the turn onto the asphalt highway.

Her temples were pounding with the pressure of memories all fighting to surface at once. That last fight. Johnny storming out the door, barely breaking his pace as he'd scooped Marie and Michael up in his arms and carried them to the back seat of her car. Her last sight of them had been in that old one-eyed Plymouth as it headed across the draw and onto the County road. Then, the sheriff's call and the headline in the paper the next day "Three Meet Death on Black Ice." No matter how many excuses she made, she kept coming back to what was her truth. Maybe they'd met Death on the shiny black ice, but the real killer was Rainee Crow.

Tears started again, but she pulled them back quickly. It was the least she could

do for Johnny.

Rainee walked into the room, turning 'round and 'round. It was the first time she'd stayed in a place this fancy and she wasn't at all sure she liked it. She wondered if they'd remember: no calls, no maid service, for five days. She figured they would . . . she'd sure paid a pretty penny convincing them.

The first thing she did was get out her paper and pen and write Tanya's address on an envelope. After looking over the already-worn newspaper clipping one last

time, she started the letter.

#### Dear Tanya:

I suppose you will have heard by the time you get this. It has happened again. I can't help feeling that Life has dealt me an inexplicably merciless blow. This time, maybe I will remain down. I know I shouldn't be talking this way, that I should have learned to take my medicine by now. It's just that, until that last fight, things had been going so well.

Could this be Life's way of teaching me to be strong? For what? All that there is

to be strong for keeps being taken away.

I want so much to judge her fairly, to be generous and trusting, but she has bewitched me once too often and from now on, I'll be wary. Her spell has been successful too frequently and too harshly to lend credence to any compassionate motives.

I can't be sure, though. Not really. Maybe she considers me her favorite adversary. The count never reaches ten before I am up and at it again. Five. Yes, five is what it takes me at most. But then, things happen that way. In fives, I mean. The old ones have always said that.

Perhaps I will choose to stay down a while longer this time. That's right: choose. Take a breather. She is a shrewd old lady, Life . . . maybe this time I will fool her.

Rainee laid the pen down and put her suitcase on the dresser. First, she removed Marie's and Michael's school pictures and placed them on the nightstand beside the bed, then she got out the dancing shawl and bottles of Scotch.

After taking off her dress, she put the white shawl around her shoulders, kicked her shoes off, and took out the Johnny Walker. She ran her thumbnail across the raised gold lettering of the label—real pretty bottle, fancy writing and all. She'd never had call to use drink of this caliber, but then she'd never fought this particular battle before.

Rainee opened the bottle, letting the smell of it swarm out, encompassing her.

Even after ten dry years, how friendly and familiar that aroma was!

She reached across the cold white tile of the bathroom counter for one of the two upturned glasses. Sonofagun. Plastic. Today was no day for plastic. As she tipped the bottle, she took only passing notice of the deceptively tender amber color, and put the cool glass bottle-lips to her own. Before the liquid had passed from one mouth to the other, she could taste it.

Then it did come, and her mouth became suddenly responsive, suddenly alive, suddenly eager. The nutty taste filled her and she languished in the warmth as it flowed into her; heating her neck, burning her throat, coming to a fiery halt in the pit of her stomach.

It was good to be in the company of an old friend.

Rainee drank until her body relented to the silent call of sleep. When she woke,

she began writing again — then drinking again.

She lost all concept of time and place, knowing only that she had to keep going; had to write, had to drink. Her days were hers alone, not twenty-four units of time, but intervals of thirst-driven wake. Her mind took her from place to another, from one situation to another, and soon they passed; these self-defined days of hers. . .

Day 2

Hi Tanya! I have decided to take her on. Now I am confused, though. Just a little, I mean. My sorrow is melting too quickly. Its icy emptiness is disappearing. I want to stretch out this frigid time. I believe it feels of death. Death; some say he is like a cold wind that chills you to the quick of your bones. But. That is the viewpoint from the outside looking in, is it not?

What do you think he is? Really, I mean. I want to find out what it is about him that nearly everyone I have loved (all but you) finds. . . found. . . so enticing.

There's a writer, an African writer—Achebe, I think his name is. He knows, as so many of our People know, that going to Death is not necessarily a tragedy. Death is not an enemy to be held off at all costs. Maybe he is a gentle foster-parent. He will take us when no one else wants us. He will let us escape into his arms. So many of us choose his way instead of fleeing it. I cannot, will not, say they are "disturbed" or weak. It is simply an option.

Rainee

Day 3

Do you see that it is three days already? Too fast, too fast.

Some iciness is yearning for me again. . . or me for it. I cannot decide which. I also cannot decide whether to respond or not. You see, I must determine beforehand how strong I am. I'm not ready for commitment, I only want to visit, to feel it out. Would I find Death too enticing? Inescapable?

I am so thankful to you because I am sure you will read this and know beyond words what it is that I am feeling. Do you also know that in writing I have reached a decision? Today I will not tangle with him. I suppose him to be one not easily taken to rejection.

Perhaps I ought to sow my oats elsewhere.

Rainee

My friend:

The days. They pass so quickly.

(Before I go further, I want to say that I know you know that I am drinking. I realize that is hard for you, but please don't be too mad or disappointed. Now, I will go on.)

In my mind (I think it was only in my mind, it is getting harder and harder to tell), I went for a walk today. A long, easy walk, at a lulling, leisurely pace. On and on I went. Up hills and down. But I kept to the road, daring only an occasional

glance into the forest.

There is something for me in the forest. It has been there all of my life. Waiting for me. Always, I felt it watching me. At eleven, when I first entered womanhood and learned of the supreme male/female union, I decided that it must take place most specially in the dark dampness of the forest. Even now, I look into the woods on the sunniest of sunny days and feel the power stirring to where, from where, I am not sure. I like to imagine the goings-on of all the millions of creatures in there; the tiniest larva of the tiniest insect—the powerful bear and the screaming cougar.

I have never told anyone this, but today I will tell you. Only you. . .

This is what I believe:

It is in this luscious darkness of the forest that Life and Death meet and make love. It is always beautiful; it always creates new beings to be entrusted to the mother, Life. . . at least for the time being. The creations? A mountain here, a river there. Or maybe a butterfly now and later a rattlesnake. Once you. . . once, me. Even they don't know, precisely, what will come of each union. Therefore, they always look forward with great anticipation. And sometimes her quivers are so large, his throbs so great, that they cause thunders in the sky, and lightning flashes that frighten away any being who might intrude.

A child's tale, you say?

Maybe, but I don't care. I only thank you for hearing me out. . .

Rainee

P.S. Tomorrow I go into the forest.

Day 5

My Most Special Friend:

Today was the day. Life's ground rules. I tried to sleep, but I could feel her

nudging me along.

I went inside, to the darkness, to the spot I knew was mine. She'd prepared a bed of velvety moss alongside a spring. It was a spring like no other, it was chanting some unknown song. Up to that moment, I'd heard many a singing spring, many a gurgling, bubbling spring, but the mellow, set rhythm of the final chant is separate from all other musics of the world.

I waited and waited. No one came. It was hot, and all I had on was my fancy shawl and my necklace. I began to sway and step to the rhythm of the chanting water, letting the long white fringe of the shawl brush lightly against the calves of my legs. I had no choice but to move. On and on I danced. Still there was no one. No bird, no fly, no chipmunk or squirrel. Not even a breeze. I danced on. The only sound but the water was the delicate click of the shells on my necklace as they bounced from side to side, from one breast to the other.

My head began to ache, to whirl, and I heard the spring call to me. I knelt by it, then tumbled into the icy waters, and it took me. It danced around me, in here, out of there. It cooled me and cleansed me. It knew what I did not.

I pulled myself out of it, onto the moss, and fell asleep once more.

That was the birth of the end. I did not know what lover this was as I lay in the

brightness. I opened my eyes and saw no one.

I was being caressed, every inch of me touched and held and bathed in magnificent warmth. I felt it—but what? Something serene; without beginning or end, without pulse or breath, but soft and warm beyond description. It touched my brow and ran along my face. Then it left my face and went into my hair, danced in my hair, ran through my hair, brought it to life. It came into my ears and I felt the flame in my goosepimples. Down inside of me it plunged, emerging hot and liquid from my nipples and spreading across my belly. I wanted to run, to scream, but it would not allow me the pretense of the earth as we have come to know it. I tried to hide, tried to deny all that I felt, but I could not.

On and on it went, across my body, the width of it, the length of it, the depth of it. Flowing behind my knee-caps, then seeping between the muscles within my thighs. Going where no lover had ever gone, leaving nothing about me virginal.

Then it came into me. Hot and solid and full. I was set afire. To it, I gave all of

myself that Life had not yet taken.

Suddenly, I saw the brilliant rays of sunshine coming through the trees, then through the countless bits of red pumice dust, entering every pore of my body. It continued to grow, filling me completely. Still, no pain. Only rapture as I lost myself to it and melted into a pool of sparkling copper, becoming so much more than I had ever been when solid. It continued to grow and spread, dipping into me, coming out covered with me, whisking what had been me. . . whisking it far, far away.

And now, what do I say? What is left to say? I don't want to confuse you, but I am unable to lie. This is being written by what very little of me is still existing within the confines of flesh, bones, body. At the completion of this letter, all that is here will be spent. I am no longer willing to straddle the gap between the forced reality and my own truth.

I have nothing more to say. I don't think I've won or lost; I gave up the fight so very long ago.

Tanya: please remember I've loved you. . .

Rainee

It was her last letter. She folded the five and placed them in the waiting envelope, then kissed the pictures of each of her children.

She turned to the suitcase once more.

Even after so many years of use, Rainee could smell the smoky scent of the buck-skin sheath when she took Grandfather's knife from the open case. She paused for a moment, letting fingers bask in the supple softness of the fringe. Then she let them travel on, across the painstakingly precise beadwork. She felt the delicate ridges of the cut-glass beads and wondered if the distant Czech beadmakers ever knew that their creations daily touched the lives of so many of her People. She thought of the hours Granny had put into this piece; choosing her design, peering through hundreds and hundreds of tiny beads then selecting them, one by one, for their uniformity in size and color. Was it any wonder that her eyes had aged so quickly?

At the remembrance of Grandfather and Granny she felt her heart tighten; it seemed to skip a beat or two. It was hard to believe two people could live so long, loving each other that way.

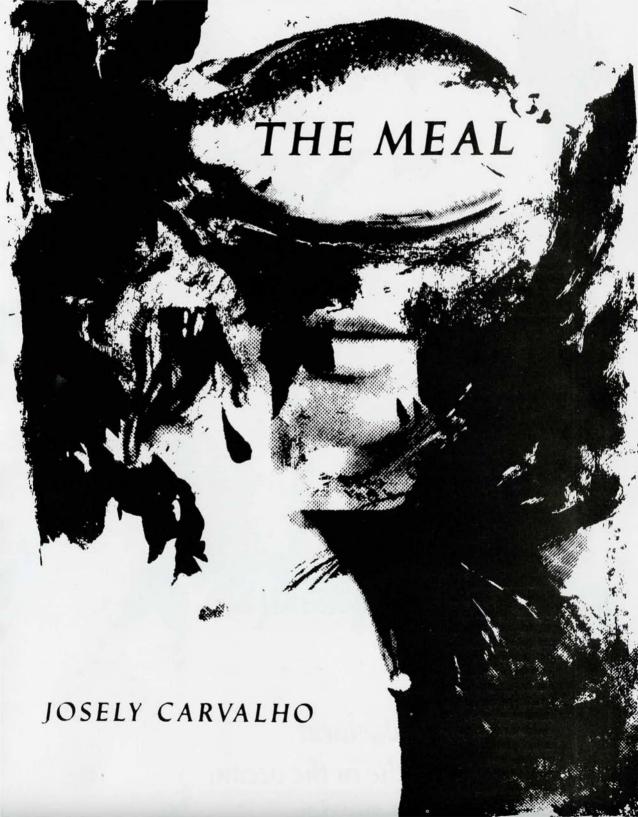
Rainee drew the knife out, marvelling at the stark contrast of the silver metal against her brown hands. She paused for a moment, trying to imagine how many deer it had bled, how many fish it had gutted, at what spot on the old lands the first owner of the antler-turned-handle had fed.

The time had come.

She rose to her feet and placed her hand between her breasts, feeling for the heartbeat. Her hand passed over her chest, slowly, deliberately, searching for the exact spot where the movement was most profound.

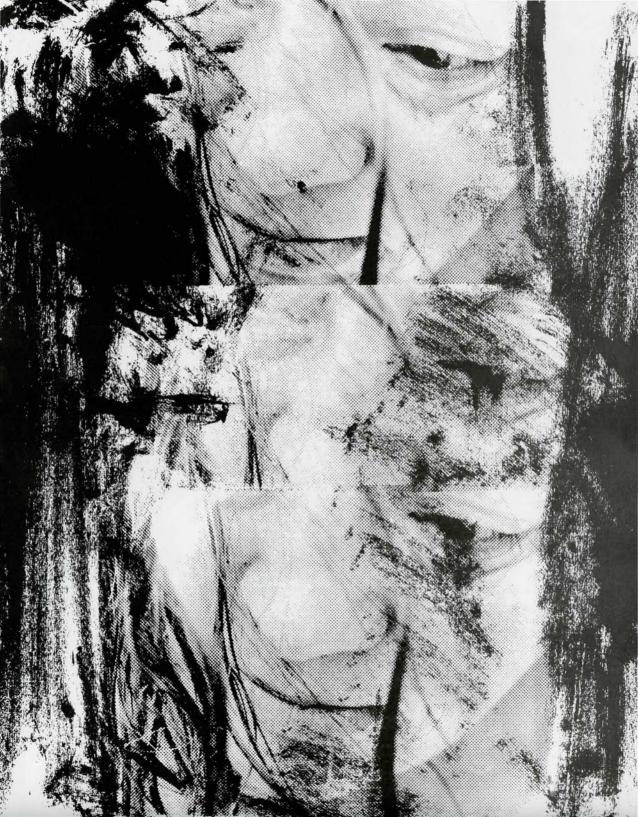
Having found it, she placed the point of the knife there, gathered her fine white dancing shawl around her shoulders and ran, hard and fast, against the wall.

She didn't cry.





Fish used to taste like meat till God let Eve bathe in the ocean, my brother told me one day







#### SMELL OF FISH

Let us pray, says a colossal bird dressed in purple as he chews a couple of breasts in a swirl of desire.

Let us pray to our demons the demons that free ourselves from our own prisons. Smell of fish cannibal of fantasies sorghum wrapped in guilt layers of unclear memories.

Let us pray to the memory notes of our growing up. transparent visions of lost childhoods
Smell of fish translucent discharge lubricating pleasure deep caverus embedded in sexual sounds retraces grandma'stories connecting little girls with future smell of codfish.

From the body of Christ, says the weightlifter news is funnelling of those who have been killed

mutilated assaulted poisoned forgotten

just across the other side of the river.

Smell of fish Mea Culpa! screams the bird in flight.



## No News Among Us

I heard another body was in the river today floating in the review of respected white men, bobbing like used suds past a troubled Kentucky line. They called her bulldagger and foul nigger scum as they filed by, their echoes bouncing sonar off the jagged mass cruising the currenttheir nightmare barge loaded with putrid, phobic cargo. They could not recover her moon-filled eyes today nor will they try tomorrow to recall her stories from mango and lace, replant her life in rich, sterile soil.

#### Teda

So black as to be invisible. a tall woman roams cooled sands at night and chews her dates with salt to stave off visions of honorless men. She strokes the heavy dagger her mother forged and sheathed under twenty suns and remembers two rough stones pounding millet seed, onyx hands mixing with goat's milk. A jeweled silver snake pierces her left nostril to signal intruders with hisses of moonlight. Teda woman walks limber and bares breasts and back to proclaim her differences, pauses free under baobab prophecy that all waters of the world will congeal and tremble from her womb.

## TERRI L. JEWELL





## Elemi

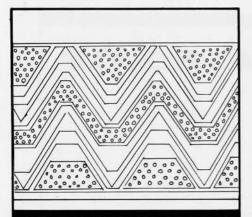
Genuflection

is the least I must do before a black-skinned woman full of spirits of the Dead. owned by dreams of lost generations that fed fires with eucharist songs. I listen in awe to her rasping screams boggy gurgles grainy shuffles shoeless patters hanging in the shadow under her chin, stark stories binding mud of Southern fear to soft nests of nappy touches melting sorrow like lozenges in hot, red throats. I have never felt my father pull me inside out and she has never seen light in a pale lover's eye but these differences are small when tossed into a lake's reflection.

#### Ha'nt

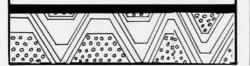
It was a full moon when Grandma sorted stones in the field that night and placed them around a heartwood statue of smooth knobs and singed grooves. She keened and swayed over drinking gourd, key seashell and herbs while touching semiprecious gems in shadowed air pressing out from her like calloused thumbs. Her menses had long seeped into earth but I felt the power there and looked toward the space where her house once stood, then knelt to dig to dig for the bones

of her.



## MYRIAM DÍAZ-DIOCARETZ

## LOVE POEMS



you come to me from the sea alien another's lover astounding the rose of my desert

sands fuse in our untamed grass

from the sea you come to me and into yo'ur liquid tongue I plunge a mí vienes del mar ajeno amante sorprendes a mi rosa del desierto

se unen las arenas en nuestra hierba indomita

del mar vienes a mí y en tus lenguas

de agua me sumerjo

confused trapped in this yearning following the waterways inland she moves

in fugue and counter-fugue the trembling of my flame confusa en la inercia de este anhelo por las vertientes se interna

en fuga y contrafuga el temblor de mi llama

so much fire animates her salt to salt merging

she lived the unrepeatable instant

one more time tanto fuego la anima de sal en sal fundida

> vivió el instante irrepetible

> > una vez más

4

your dove to my dove opens in secret foliation

over there the night waits captive wearing a nest of dew

in your pupils gleam the birds of my fountain

tu paloma a mi paloma se abre en secreta foliación

la noche ahi en espera cautiva teje su nido de rocíos

en tus pupilas rielan las aves de mi fuente 5

Time between parenthesis Let us not speak of death nor of histories—

I want to follow that
eliptic route beyond
the most constant garden
I want
there
soft
labiate
mauve
I want, I want
I want
in the depths
of your galactic
flower to soar
in your love

be kind

tiempos entre paréntesis. no hablemos de muerte ni de historia—

quiero seguir la ruta
ecliptica hacia el más
constante jardin
quiero
ahí
suave
labiada
malva
quiero, quiero,
quiero
en el centro de tu flor
galáctea emprender
el vuelo de tu amor

amable

6

since then my hands cover my face

it avoids the light

over the sea of one thousand rings of one thousand rings you rode

over there I had to forget you

of what use are my hands the sea rings or this light if wherever I find you I must leave you

wherever I may find you I must leave you

desde entonces mis manos cubren mi faz

no desea la luz

en el mar de mil anillos en mil anillos cabalgaste

allí debí olvidarte

de qué sirven mis manos el mar los anillos o la luz si allí donde te encuentre debo dejarte

alli donde te encuentre debo dejarte

(Trans: Susan Sherman)

# TWO POEMS FRANBASKIN

## While Watching Barry Paint

Sucking the little bones from the chicken necks I look for every thread of meat like this life of mine at the top of the tower one flight higher than the others

"You'll lose weight," they say or

"It's good for your heart," but I know better they wouldn't have my place for the softest whitest veal handsomely served on linen I have linen old and spotted tablecloths I lay out proudly when friends come for brunch or dinner serving some crêpe concoction I dreamed up myself like this life of mine and the variations that never leave my head

How I have wished for something else more successful and making money yet always returning up and up to the three small rooms and the windows in the tower at the bottom of the island are like stars trapped within an obelisk framed off-center in my front window and I'll be good tonight avoiding the bread and pasta that makes me fat savoring instead slivers of white meat floating in my soup it's never enough to fill me up

#### Mutual Recognition

I don't remember his name
I scarcely knew it then
he was smaller than images I worked up in dreams about boys and dating
it was eighteen hours exactly I remember that
and my wasted sealskin fur and his almost cowboy fleece-lined jacket
blue jeans and boots
but that was nothing unusual walking through Yale on a weekend
two hands in one satin pocket

I remember the boy who brought me
he didn't want to
hiding behind sunglasses and the long fast car he was so proud of
and I loved the two hour silence
bathing in loud music
grateful for its separating me from the driver
speeding down the highway of a Friday afternoon
I dreamed of a dream of adolescence

I haven't thought about it for years
but last night someone talked of being in love in New Haven
I looked at him closely but it was someone else
and too young to have been the boy with his hand in my pocket
"This is it," he said holding out his arms
he was showing me his room
I was thinking about the oddity of being chosen by one
ignored by the other

"This is it," I would say to myself
or words like it standing in line at a bar
eyeing someone who might have been eyeing me
now weaving slyly in my direction
guided by the irrational
acceptance would leave me passive
revulsion would send me looking for my girlfriend
or the john
any easy escape but that was much later
the night I spent with the boy in New Haven was the closest thing till then to sex
camping out with a dozen others on a hill overlooking the town
a burned-out bon-fire in the middle
we held each other and I shook
an inopportune moment to be cold but I was

Six months later I saw him again in Boston
he was living there and we talked of my getting a room in his house
but nothing ever came of that
I cannot tell you what love is
though at the moment I stood in the boy's dorm room
I decided it was mutual recognition
I will let you in my skin and you will let me in yours
but nothing lasting eighteen hours only can be too serious
and longevity is a mystery I have yet to explore
or endure

# REBECCA LEWIN The Secret Father

His certainty when he said it shocked her, shot a tremor of anger and sadness straight to the top of her head, a feeling that danced on her skull like some tiny demon with pointed heels. It was a desperate sureness, as if he were a hungry but proud man and was trying to convince a cop that he hadn't stolen the lamb chops that had just fallen out of his jacket sleeve.

Tamar wondered for a second if his forceful tone of voice was manipulating his beliefs, rather than the other way around. But then regretfully she admitted that he must have given the matter a great deal of thought long ago and had come to his conclusion because he was actually convinced it was right and good. One of his favorite sayings was, "That government is best which governs least"—which he attributed to Thomas Jefferson, but which she knew was in fact Thoreau's. He believed that America—meaning conservative government—was almost always correct in its actions, and that it was heresy not to bless it. Unlike his father, who'd been a socialist and had aligned in Russia with the Bolsheviks. Later, when she was able to collect herself, Tamar realized that what he didn't understand was that the wisest judgments of the past can be disastrous when applied in the present.

What her father had said with such certainty was, "We were right to use the

bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

A puff like smoke flew out from between her breasts and left a hole that ached. She spun in her chair as if she'd been hit and wondered how he was even partly responsible for her birth. But he was; she glanced at her hands and saw his fingers, she touched her hair and felt the texture of his fine curls, which were silver, transparent as icicles now.

She had known him her thirty years, of course, but she was still shocked; he'd never revealed this opinion to her until now. His ability to think what he did must be a fundamental part of him. Since she never suspected it, she was all the more disappointed. She leaned back against her chair trying to come up with a response

and realized suddenly that she knew next to nothing about him.

Did he have any friends? She saw no evidence of them. She knew little beyond his surface, his day-to-day counting out of pills, typing prescription labels with one finger, measuring and mixing powders and liquids. Had he ever had affairs? She suspected so, what with the way the women always fawned over him and took his instructions so seriously. What did he care about, what had been the successes of his life, what had hurt him? He had never told her any incident of his childhood but one; when he was eleven, a Yeshiva boy on the Lower East Side of New York, he'd thrown a lit firecracker into an old lady's car and scared her silly, and been taken into the police station for it. That was all she knew about his childhood.

Aside from errands, he had taken her out alone only once in the whole time she was growing up—to New York, for a matinee and dinner. She had been so pleased then, when she was eleven, to go out just with him. She'd tried so hard to look chic, but she felt oafish and fat in her pink skirt. The restaurant was a charming one, decorated with silver Russian samovars and fine, colorful paintings. She could see, as they sat there, that he didn't know what to talk to her about. But it was all right; nothing could have spoiled that day.

But now was now. True, he was a type of businessman and she might've expected from that.... But it was a small business and almost a caretaking one—he was a pharmacist and owned his own drugstore, the old-fashioned kind, in the converted storefront of a gingerbreaded Victorian house on the main road. Tamar often thought about him standing behind his counter, nodding kindly, with true concern, to a customer, answering questions about side effects, about administering enemas, or the danger point of a baby's fever. What had prevented her knowing him? She tried to recall what they talked about together: About whether her landlord was taking care of her building properly and about events in the news. About her father's customers and their lives (he never asked anything specific about her life), which to him were sometimes weirdly comic. Like the time a woman had tried to commit suicide, but failed, having mistaken her laxative pills for aspirin.

They were sitting in lawn chairs in his front yard, which was in a country town in Connecticut, drinking Tom Collinses. A white, metal table stood between them. She'd taken a bus out of New York City, where she lived, to visit for the weekend. She was a high school English teacher, but she moonlighted for a florist; as the sun went down and lights began twinkling like stars in the skyscraper windows, she arranged bouquets for weddings and tended the sensitive orchids. The chill of the ice in her glass against her teeth reminded her of the flower refrigerator. She was often amazed, gazing at the flowers through the glass doors, at how colorful and fresh they were although their stems had been cut. Odd, how the cold pre-

served them in such exquisite condition though they were dead.

She knew she was thinking this because her mother had died five months ago. It had occurred to her then, morbidly, that the flower refrigerator was like the drawers in a morgue where they keep the bodies cold. After that, the gladdies and the feathery irises and the great, white, fur-ball chrysanthemums on their sturdy green stems all looked dead to her, despite their appearance of health. She remembered how slim and handsome her mother had looked, even dead, dressed in black, her short, steel-dark hair swept back. But her mother's slimness, like the chilliness of the flowers when Tamar gathered them out of the refrigerator, had not been a sign of health. How she missed her mother! And she missed her father, even sitting there next to him. There was something she expected him to tell her, something she had a feeling he knew that would make the world make sense: what was it? She had been waiting for years for him to tell her.

Since her mother died, after sitting *shiva*, Tamar had visited her father every single weekend, because he'd been very dependent on his wife. Tamar imagined him distraught alone at night, pacing the halls of his house. She gave him cooking lessons because it made her sad to think of him eating canned spaghetti sauce and such. She cleaned away the little circles of grease that had dripped from his gravy

boat, and which he sometimes forgot to wipe off the counter after his solitary Shabbat chicken.

It was summer and they'd watched in amazement a few minutes before when a pheasant hen flashed across the lawn. They had just started talking about an article on the front page of the *Times* about a demonstration in Washington, D.C., that called for an end to the nuclear arms race. He'd stood up, before they'd reached the point of his comment, exclaiming at the gracefulness of the long-tailed rust-colored bird, at its stick-like running legs crossing each other like a row of red X's between the blue blades of grass. He said in his gentle, delighted, scholarly pharmacist's voice, "Ah, *phasianus!*" and she smiled.

But now his face had turned rigid and implacable; he seemed to lose the liquidity of a living being. He said, "It's kept Europe out of war for the last forty years."

She recovered enough to say, "It's not keeping the Middle East out of war." "But it ended World War II. If we hadn't used it, they would've attacked us."

"You can't tell me it was necessary to kill all those civilians. Imagine all the pregnant women—I read that there were spontaneous births in the street! Do you think they would've attacked you?"

He sighed and leaned back in his chair and stared at the border of rhododendron bushes by the road. "Nobody wants to kill women. It was either their women or ours."

"Theirs or ours?" She tipped her glass and watched the dripping orange slice and the bright cherry and the ice cubes plunge to the ground and settle among the grass blades like dust balls on the bristles of a brush. "It's not as if those women belonged to us or them. What's the difference between those women and women here? What's the difference between anybody? We don't have to take sides as if we're watching some high school basketball game." She waited for a quietly buzzing metallic-blue dragonfly to settle on the edge of the table. She lowered her voice. "Daddy, it was another Holocaust."

That was when his face went pale and his whole body seemed to cave in a little, making him look old, which scared her. But then he filled out again, as if finding an answer allowed him to gain his strength back, and said, "War is war," without meeting her eyes. "Look at this dragonfly." The delicate wings whirred.

"You can't admit our government was wrong because if you stopped for a minute to think about it seriously you'd never in your life be able to forgive yourself."

He blinked, and rubbed his eyes. He took a pencil out of his shirt pocket, touched the dragonfly's tail with it, and the insect dashed off. "Did you know that fruitflies have hair on their knees?" he said. "Drosophila melanogaster."

He was refusing to answer her! He droned on about fruitflies, taking refuge, as usual, in scientific facts. For the first time, she couldn't concentrate on his fascinating little lecture. She was seeing him as if through someone else's eyes and though she had his hands and forehead and even his gestures he suddenly seemed to be a stranger. Who had she been taking care of all this time, listening to respectfully for all these years? A person who wouldn't carry on a true conversation with her, who had some thoughts that horrified her! She felt the ground move under her feet and gasped, flung her arm out and knocked the newspaper onto the grass. A roar filled her ears and she swung around; it was only a truck passing on the road.

Her father bent down and scooped up the newspaper. She had a feeling she wouldn't be able to bring herself to come and see him next weekend. How would she even go in the house with him and make dinner and sit with him and smile? She could hardly look at him. Her thoughts were so loud she could only hear him intermittently—when she forced herself to listen—saying words like "sepia eyes," "hermaphrodite," and "gene pool."

She said "Excuse me," and hurried into the house. In the kitchen, she thumbed through the pages of the phonebook, picked up the receiver that hung on the wall, and dialed the number of the bus station. She would take the bus home tonight. True, he was old, he needed company. But *she* wasn't old, she was only thirty. But what if he needed help, what if he was lonely? She was his only child. She covered

her mouth, as if that could stop her from thinking.

When she was off the phone, she walked down the hall and stood by the screen door, staring out. Moths flew into the screen; the powder from their wings made tiny, lemon-colored clouds in the interstices. The red sun was settling down into the treetops in the West. Her father turned the page of the newspaper he was still trying to read, though the light was fading. He was almost in the middle of the lawn, at that table that glowed white as his hair. He saw her and raised his hand to wave. She stepped back abruptly, as if he could have touched her from so great a distance.

## Eileen O'Neill THE RE-IMAGING OF EROS: Women Construct Their Own Sexuality

Let me begin by reclaiming the word 'pornography' and sketching its relation to erotica. In the liberal political tradition erotica generally is considered to be a milder form of pornography: the content is taken to be more suggestive than explicit, and the aim is to produce some degree of sexual interest in the viewer rather than intense sexual arousal. But recently feminist writers have attempted to draw the distinction along more strongly normative lines. (1) On this view the erotic is that which has a content apt to arouse sexual interest in the viewer and which is deemed more sensuous and less lewd than pornography. In addition, it is that towards which we feel that such a sexual response is legitimate. Pornography, on this analysis, is a representation which is apt to arouse sexual interest because of the sexual illegitimacy of what is represented, and which endorses such a response on those grounds.

I think that it is immensely useful to have a descriptive, non-evaluative term which denotes sexually explicit representations that aim at sexual arousal. And 'pornography' has functioned in this way in our liberal tradition. On the other hand, there seems little question of the need for applying normative distinctions

to the varieties of sexual representation, as feminists have suggested.

In response I propose the following new way of treating the pornographic/erotic dichotomy: I shall use the term 'pornography' to refer to sexually explicit representations which have arousal as an aim. I shall use the term 'obscene pornography' to refer to pornography which violates particular sexual customs or mores. The obscene is not subjective in the sense that it arises from ahistorically grounded preferences of individuals. Instead, it is relative to the value systems of particular groups within specific cultures at a given time. Pornography which violates universizable moral maxims about respect for personhood I shall call 'noxious pornography.' This type of pornography aims at sexual arousal via represented, or clearly intimated, harm to a person. This latter must be distinguished from hurt to a body, thus, I leave open the possibility of non-noxious S&M pornography.

My view of the erotic has been influenced by the work of French feminists like Luce Irigaray, and most notably by Audre Lorde's provocative essay "Uses of the Erotic." (2) The erotic is what *expresses* sexual arousal and desire rather than what *causes* them. It is what suggests it, brings the feeling to mind, by making me aware of myself as a physical, sexual being. The erotic makes me aware, as it were, of my very fleshiness, and of my capacity for sexual pleasure. Erotica *may* cause sexual excitement, but if so, this is a further effect and not essential to it. Explicit sexual

content and/or intention to arouse will work against the expressive effect of eroticism. The more sexuality is graphically represented, the more likely its intent will be to sexually arouse rather than to *express* sexuality.

This view explains how the erotic can empower us in more places than just our beds. If Audre Lorde is correct, and the erotic can energize us in our work and struggle, and that it can be a form of knowledge, then surely the erotic is *not* that which puts us into a state of intense sexual need or orgasm. When we are in the latter state we usually can barely see beyond our lovers. Eroticism is calm passion.

Finally, we can see how the erotic can be used in struggle both personal and political. It makes sense here to speak of the "eroticization of pain." A tenor sax may express sadness and simultaneously eroticize it. What I am made aware of through the music is the possibility of sexual healing. Quite a number of the works of women artists at which I've looked have this property of expressing, rather than representing, points of pain in their lives. And part of these works' eroticism is the concomittant healing quality. In what follows, I shall suggest this: it is in the problematics of woman as sexual agent that we can find a major focus in women artists' attempts at re-imaging their own sexuality. I hope to sketch various strategies with which women are alternately playing with, assaulting, or pulling the rug out from under Eros and envisioning a goddess of their own making.

One of the major categories of pornographic and erotic classical art in the West, perhaps its primary, has been the female nude. She was the object of the male artist's gaze, passive result of his active intellect and libido, creation of his subjectivity. And because of the conventions of classical painting, the female

nude, in almost all cases, was reduced to a "sexual object."

But, it might be argued, aren't all nudes (including male nudes) objects for the spectator's gaze? How can a representation not be an object of possible

perception?

A painting, as a material entity, can be an object of perception. Many paintings, however, have a dual nature. They are not only things in and of themselves, they also have a "representational character"—they purport to refer to something outside themselves. (3) Paintings which are typically termed "representational paintings" are of something. For example, if I show you a picture of a tree and ask you what you see, you can either say "a painting" or "a tree."

But a further concept is needed before we can return to nudes. It is the concept

of representation-as. (4)

When a painting represents an entity there need be no similarity or likeness between the two; it simply is necessary for the painting to denote the object. Thus, one of Manet's sketches is a representation of Baudelaire's mistress because it denotes Jeanne Duval. I might want to say further that Manet's sketch *represents* Jeanne Duval *as* a lifeless doll. What I would mean here is that Jeanne Duval is denoted by the figure in the sketch, and that the sketch belongs to the classification of lifeless doll images.

So when I say that in classical painting the female nude is reduced to a sexual object, what I mean is that the nude women represented, or purportedly represented, in the paintings are represented-as sexual objects. They frequently are depicted in a private or fantasy space wherein their nudity is addressed to the male spectator. Their nudity, the placement of their bodies, their gestures, glances, and movements (when there are any) rarely express their own sexuality. In fact,



"Bathtub" MEREDITH LUND

in classical European painting, woman's own sexual efficacy is minimized precisely in order to enhance the feelings of potency and "power over" which the male spectator achieves in viewing the nudes.

Classical male nudes in their stance and gesture generally convey a physical and sexual vitality. But these nudes often evoke a sense of the religious or political power of males as well. (5) For it is the male nudes that guard and are depicted as active in public space. And they are used to represent what is deemed by many to be the most potent force of all: the Deity.

How, then, can a woman artist paint a female nude without merely providing a

passive object for male delectation?

One solution, which by now has a long history (from Artemisia Gentileschi to Joan Semmel), is for the artist, the subject, who is about to depict her object of thought, to paint herself. In this way the nude is, in a sense, the subject. More exactly, the nude denotes the artist-agent.

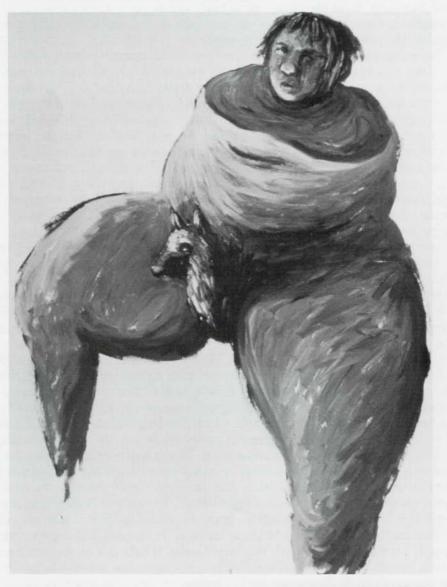
For example, many of Meredith Lund's paintings contain self-portraiture. But it is not this feature alone which blocks the viewer from reading the nudes as represented-as passive vis-a-vis her/his own desire. Lund's work is an attempt to revision the world as it was before "the Cartesian masculinization of thought," as philosopher Susan Bordo puts it. (6) It stands in opposition to the world-view of detached observers, fixed in specific spatio-temporal locales, who gain access to the objective realm of external bodies or their painted representations. Here we have a medieval sense of relatedness to the world. The viewer is continuous with the represented objects, spirits, personages and fabulous creatures, through elaborate layerings of allegorical signs and associations. Modern spatial, temporal, and causal relations partially give way to relations of metaphor and metonymy, or more properly to the medieval relations of "convenience," "emulation," "analogy," and "sympathy." (7) And in this world-view, in which all things "express" each other and stand in relations of similitude, the viewer becomes just another sign in this sea of meaning relations.

Her painting entitled *Bathtub* is an erotic palimpsest. What we see is the slight contact of sponge upon knee, which expresses, through a variety of similitudes, the pleasures of the body: the soothingness of water, the sensuality of being sponged, the possibility of intimacy. There is a great tentativeness in this work, a precariousness, and a sense of sexual tension. Here we have the erotics of the possible.

In addition to the problem of women being represented-as sexually passive vis-a-vis the viewer, depictions of the female nude traditionally have reflected the underlying assumption in Western thought of a nature/culture distinction. Woman has been associated with nature—that which is to be subdued, dominated, plowed or fertilized by means of male physical power, technology or sexual potency.

The paintings of Asian-American artist, Margo Machida, challenge this distinction and simultaneously attempt to assert woman's affinity with nature and her powerfulness and dangerousness. The painting, On the Alert can be read as a visual parallel to feminist Susan Griffin's book, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her. The dog or wolf heads are no mere phallic symbols. These are images of wildness and power which Machida reclaims for women. The artist's arms are bound; but this lack of control, this helplessness, is balanced by the erotic power which literally leaps from her womb. The piece functions as a revolutionary call for women to ready themselves for the release of the potency within them.

It is important, in this context, to note the difference between Machida's nudes and most of the "dangerous women" and femme fatales that can be found in much modern art. For we might well be able to imagine her nudes as expressing male fears of castrating females. The crucial difference, as I see it, is that the figures denote the female artist. This does *not* imply that representations of dangerous looking women provide us with a new image of Eros if they are painted by women, while they are just part of the old male bias if they are painted by men. What is new about Machida's nudes is the special combination: they are self-portraits, *and* they represent the woman artist as potent and potentially dangerous. Through the denoting of the artist/agent, the agency of the female nudes can be combined with their representation-as sexually vigorous.



"On the Alert" MARGO MACHIDA

Of course it would be an oversimplification simply to assume that the placement of an image in a context directed toward feminist or lesbian interests absolved it of all complicity with culture's view of woman's body as fetish and commodity. It is, I think, partly for this reason that many women artists are reluctant to produce either erotica or pornography—the material generally considered to have most degraded woman's image. I am utterly sympathetic, yet I also believe that women can be empowered by erotica and pornography.

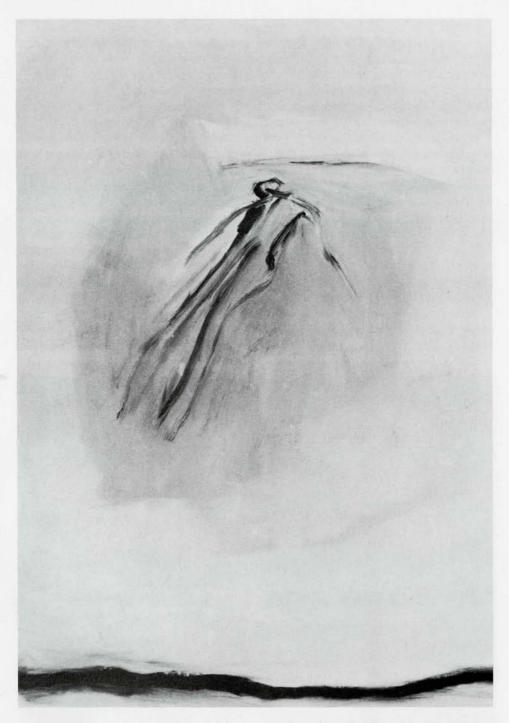
After the nude, I suppose the second most common theme in traditional erotic or pornographic art is the depiction of sexual acts. Lee Stoliar's ceramic wall sculptures do not simply bring to mind our corporeality; they are erotica pushed nearer to its limits. These are explicit representations which aim at quickening

the pulse, and which, thus, approach the pornographic.

In One of the Ways the question of who is active in heterosexual intercourse gets re-appraised. Here the male lover does not so much act upon the female, as he is enveloped by the embrace of the women's legs, hands, and sex. The piece invites us to reconsider what sexuality, indeed what our world, would be like if the central metaphor for heterosexual intercourse were female engulfing rather than male penetration. Here we are forced to reconsider heterosexual agency.

The topic of anxiety or fear concerning sexual acts has been expressed in classical and modern Western art by a particular range of visual metaphors: decapitation (St. John the Baptist, Holofernes), loss of hair (Samson), the vagina dentata,





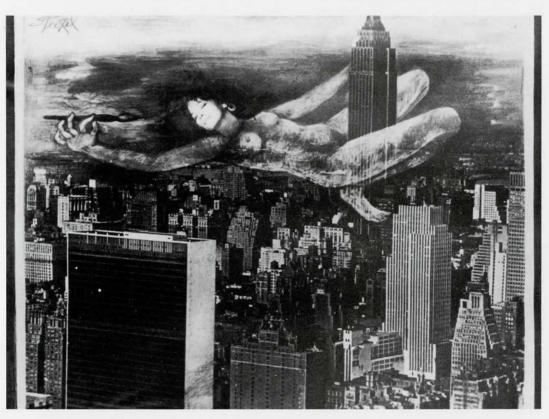
"Abandoned" BARRIE KARP

the vampiress, and the femme fatale, to name just a few. But the theme of rape, for example, is almost never treated from the point of view of the victim, nor is the anguish of a woman pressured into sexual service, nor the distress of a woman bound sexually and emotionally by her own internal sense of powerlessness.

In Seduced and Abandoned, an oil on paper piece, Barry Karp depicts her rape several decades earlier at the age of thirteen. This work, like much of Karp's, contains an illusive tension: it is at once light, tender, and quiet, as well as wrenching and emotionally piercing. As both the title and the formal qualities of the painting suggest, this is an attempt to express the feelings of a young girl in the aftermath of her attack—a theme quite unique in Western painting.

The critique of Western religious and secular symbols that are rooted in attempts to deny the female body and its desires has a feminist history of its own. Anita Steckel has been a visual pioneer of feminist sexual politics since the 60's. Steckel's Giant Woman On the Empire State Building depicts the artist/woman positioning herself with ease and utter abandon within the patriarchal landscape. Here woman takes hold of the phallic city, which is the source of her physical pleasure and the material means for her ability to paint the heavens.

As this image makes clear, in the midst of all the questioning and all the struggle to sexually define themselves, women artists also make room for humor and abandon in their re-imaging of Eros. In the comic, joyous, ecstatic side of the



"Giant Woman on the Empire State Building" ANITA STECKEL

erotic and the pornographic, I am reminded of Luce Irigaray's words: "A woman's (re)discovery of herself can only signify the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another... of never being simply one. It is a sort of universe in expansion for which no limits could be fixed and which, for all that, would not be incoherent.(8)

#### **FOOTNOTES**

This is an edited version of a paper originally delivered at the Women Art and Power symposia at Rutgers University, February, 1986.

(1) Eva Feder Kittay, "Pornography and the Erotics of Domination," Beyond Domination, ed. Carol

Gould (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983).

(2) Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which is Not One," and "When the Goods Get Together," *New French Feminisms*, ed. Marks and de Courtivron (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1981). "Uses of the Erotic" can be found in Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Trumanburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1984).

The notion of the expressive quality of erotica derives from a suggestion by Antonia Phillips to the 1970 British Govt. Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship. See an excerpt of this report in *Pornography and Censorship*, ed. Copp and Wendell (N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1983).

- (3) I say that all such paintings "purport to refer" rather than simply "refer" because it is beyond the scope of this essay to address the issue of whether depictions of fictional entities refer (i.e. denote) anything.
- (4) See Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art (N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1968).
- (5) See Margaret Walters, The Nude Male: A New Perspective (N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1979).
- (6) Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," Signs 11, #3 (Spring, 1986), pgs. 439–456.
- (7) See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1970), ch.2.
- (8) Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," in New French Feminisms, p. 104.



#### On Hearing Thunder

Blues riffs strut moon black
I listen to her talk spirit
O yeah
Move mountains on nightstreets
Stoop woman of ancestral memory
drumming

"I've got to DEAL with this"
"I'm just coming to myself"
"The wings beat at my feet
So I pick a night and I dance."

The occult ache of her rage
O yeah totemic
Dreams inside the wind
She shakes out the demons
Shakes her whole arms
Shakes the demons out from her fingers
Stands crazy in broom weed
Shaking out silver snakes
Head pressed down to her warrior heart
In the afterglow of fireweed
Summons the luminous dark
Shakes out the demons
Shakes her whole arms
Blues riffs strut moon black
Stunned by her own music.

The moon rubs her back on the black keys
I listen to her talk spirit
Talk story Talk ninth street
Be ninth street Talk energies
Night birds cawing
Like this beautiful woman who plays the piano
And looks like Ida Lupino.

I see her coming towards me
Like Harriet Tubman warming to danger
Her belly voice emphatic as jalapeña peppers
Summons the laughing dark
This quasar moves with a purpose
She is this BAD
Blues riffs strut moon black
Wild-eyed like memory in the moonlight.

#### Turning the Corner

She thought she could coast out When she should have been going forward Dragging thunder from the underbrush Crawling into tail-spin She thought she could breathe life back in Return to herself This woman so full of the earth Rooted in stars Hangs her gritty talons on prairie winds Travels this ghost town backwards riding the sky "Hey Blood!" I'm a hard workin' woman Pulse of prairie rose promise Song of tularosa desert The earth sings restless Summoning earth-spirit I'm a hard workin' woman Cunning in starlight Tired of losing Talking Drum.

She hit a responsive high and woke to power Hissing charasmatic riffs
As grassroots deepen in violet
Rebellious where the earth sings

The deep tones of her dissonance
Snare-drum and four-stringed base
She cut her milk teeth on Santana
Sirocco-burnt sienna whirring to crescendo
Pentecostal starry speaking in tongues.
She holds the living fire in her hands
Sinewy hypnotic
Singeing cottonwoods on dirt roads
Black Buffalowoman curving prairie grass
So how did she know I would follow behind her
Ovulating thunder on fertile earth?
So how did she know I'd swing double axe in prairie winds
Letting loose like a dark cloud following behind?

you got no reason to ask how i am anymore i don't want to answer you

you got no reason to ask if i'm okay that's a yes or no question there is a whole lot of me we are all answering different

## gina talandis

my old dog is sick and she's part of me
that's not okay
i'm sixteen dollars short of paying my bills
that's not okay
my apartment is a mess
my car is full of shit
the cat litter needs changing
my father is twenty years older than he was three years ago
the government is looking stupider every day

## male women

the women who have fought through custody battles for their children and beatings because of lovers are opening my eyes but the anger that is swelling in the light is starting to have a life of its own

that's not okay

i'm scared of the struggle inside

i ended up spending my twenty-ninth birthday in a bar with two women i've never met before from out of town honeymoon they said and the one that had just come out was asking me to get the phone number of another friend of mine

and i think that sucks

but i laughed it off kept the fucking peace

told my friend she put her arms around me shook her head we both been with women that had just come out

she swept me onto the dance floor with those strong arms sometimes it works she says ignoring the love song we danced to and sometimes it don't forty years plus and sometimes they act like little boys that just discovered girls cause it feels good for them cause they finally got tired of the bullshit they used to try to push on us

I'm not a girl
not for nobody
i'm a woman and i've worked long and hard to get here
and don't want to play your adolescent games
like you played with your mother
when you refused to admit that you needed her when you felt strong
but cried in her arms at any little hurt
when no one was looking

i ain't your mama and that ain't okay

yes i'm still learning too
i'm still learning to let the steam from the burns
down inside my own caverns escape
and condense on my rubbed raw eyelids

that's okay

i'm learning that i am a whole lot more than what the woman i'm sleeping with thinks of me

that's damn good

and you i'm learning that you just want to hear that i'm okay that i understand that my door will always be open that you need to experiment keep your life of your own someday you'll be ready to settle down you want me there then and sometimes now

last night you slipped away with me dancing within my strong arms paying attention to your music gripping my tight shoulders while i showed you how to make love to a woman

today with all your clothing tastefully intact you remind me that words said when your breathing was hard and your eyes clamped shut to make doubly sure it was dark and no one could see can't always be taken seriously

i laughed it off i kept the fucking peace

i took myself into my own strong arms swept myself out onto the street dancing to the lovesong it has taken me so many of you to write

and that's okay

#### Loosestrife

## HELENE KENDLER

Even at the roadside in a ditch lined with garbage of the summer life—fractured bottles, whiplashed condoms pitched from passing cars—even here loosestrife survives, proliferates. And in the field it has no other strategy, it spreads, deploys its thick green stalks, its yield of spiky purple flowers above our heads as we retreat undefended on the loose-limbed grass, tired of this heat, our lies—the nightly shelling, green and purple noose that binds us, shrapnel seeded in our eyes—loosestrife the only thing that flourishes as first you cultivate my bed

then root yourself in his.

## August, Full Moon, A West St. Pier

On the rotting boards of an abandoned pier half-sunk below the highway:
This is where we find the breeze.
The way a boil is lanced and drained, the swollen air subsides as we advance to the firmest planks that front the Hudson where our bodies drink the wind.

Two ships gorged with munitions take the horizon from opposite sides. Eventually their wakes cross and form the algebraic x, the unknown factor. It slaps for a while on the river scum and froth.

Three hundred miles to the north white-tailed deer are edging into streams in the same magnetic light that draws you to me now, draws the others closer in, lovers thirsting for a breeze, stepping arm in arm onto the pier. They are so silent as they begin to drink, may nothing startle them or scatter these slender silhouettes that move with such precision along the borders of desire.

# SARAH: LOST AND FOUND

# A ONE-CHARACTER PLAY BY

# **CLARE COSS**

Time: The Present Setting: Sara's kitchen

SARA pours herself a cup of tea. SHE speaks directly to the audience.

#### Based on Interviews with Sadonia Ecker Wiesen

My husband was gone one year and you should have heard my friends like there's no tomorrow. Sara, you gotta go out and meet people. Find a husband. Thirty-five years with one good man, God rest his soul, and they were all after me to do it again. My married friends dropped me. They were all couples and they didn't want a fifth wheel around. I'd actually pick up the phone to hear, "Sara, my husband is going to a meeting tonight. Come to dinner." I've known these women for over forty years. We raised our kids together. What's so terrible about my being with their husbands? I thought, let me try to meet someone. I started talking with a nice woman in the Deltan singles, Martha, and she said, "Come with me to a singles weekend. You'll love it. It won't take you long to meet a man."

We went away for this weekend in the Catskills and it was just a disaster, a real disaster. There were eight hundred and forty-five of us. We were something like

two hundred and some odd men and six hundred women.

This was billed as the big singles weekend for twenty-eight plus. You know twenty-eight plus starts with fifty plus. Twenty-eight plus twenty-eight. All the single groups were there. The Deltans, the Parents without Partners, and the ones with initials, the R and R or the M and M or whatever it's called—the S and M. The setting was beautiful and the air was fresh and the time of year was May. Right before Mother's Day. The women were just lovely. I have never seen so many hundreds of well-dressed, well-shaped, good-looking, motivated, intelligent women. And every one of them was out looking for a man. It was very sad. But I thought, no, I've got to have a good time.

There were lectures going on in different rooms. I sat in on, why is sex so important in marriage? Why is sex important before you get married, or is it important before you get married, or whatever it was. One man was discussing, sex is not the important thing. You gotta find somebody you can relate to. After all, if you want to relieve yourself there are a million ways. I hollered out, Right! One woman says, "I'm sorry, I'm married thirty-two years and my husband died and I'm old fashioned. I can't just pick myself up and go to bed with somebody. It's not my schtick. I'm not oriented that way." And another woman says, "Neither am I. I'm brought up in the old school—you shouldn't/you mustn't/you can't. I hope to meet somebody who would wait until marriage." I was getting disgusted already. The airconditioning wasn't on. It was hot and over-crowded. I heard what the whole thing was and walked out. Martha and I strolled around the grounds. That weekend was a big bust. Never met a man I was the slightest bit interested in.

The next time I went was the first weekend in August. Martha is saying, "This is a new place—really nice. Audubon. Not like the last one." The first thing I did was go right into the pool. Martha just sat, thinking she is so glamorous with her black lace bathing suit she's afraid to get wet and her blond hair. But I had a ball, cuz I didn't care about my hair. I took one look around and there was no man I would cross the street with. So I figured, let me have a good time. The beach chairs were all around the pool where they had music for dancing. I love dancing in a bathing suit. That's really nice.

After a good swim I walked over to the dancing. There is this idiot motioning with his finger, pointing to the women, not you, not you, not you,—you. And

then he beckons for this woman to get up. And I thought—what—he must be kidding. You can't look like that, he looked like a crumb. He had a bathing suit down almost to his knees and bowed out piano-legs. I mean he looked like something out of 1918. You know. He wasn't even today's guy. And there was this silly look on his face—hooray, I'm a man! You're all waiting for me! I watched him dance. And then somebody came over and just touched my arm and I danced with him. But he couldn't dance, poor fellow. He just liked to touch. And then we all sat down.

Next thing I know that idiot, the pointer, points to me. I get up and start towards him. Then he says, "I wasn't pointing to you." I didn't know what to do. I walk back to Martha and she says, "Well, what happened over there, I saw you dancing." I said, "No good. I'm going back in the water." I just swam away.

When it got cool, I said to Martha, "I'm going to change my clothes and go to play tennis." "All in one day?" "Yes, all in one day." I put on my white shorts and my white top and went down to the tennis courts. I began to hit the ball against the wall. A woman walks over and says, "Oh, look, you want to play?" "I'd love to play," I said. "You want to go down to the courts or play wall tennis?" She said, "I like wall tennis." "Me, too." It didn't make any difference. We played for awhile and she said, "I'm waiting for someone." "Okay." Then this man came and called her over. They walked away.

By this time it was almost five-thirty. I hit the ball around for awhile. Out of nowhere a tall older man came up to me and asked, "Are you playing with any-

one?" "No." "Wait a minute. I'll go get my racket."

We went down to the tennis courts and I had a delightful time. We got in quite a few volleys. After ten minutes or less he says, "Well, that's it for me. I'm not your age." "Oh, you play a beautiful game." "That was my favorite sport. But since I'm retired from the bench,—"He made it a point to mention the bench. I said, "Oh, that was my field. I worked for lawyers, you know, as a legal secretary." We walked back, he puts his arm around me, "Tell me. Are you a widow?" "Yes." "How long?" "A little over a year." "You know, you don't belong here. Not your type. This is not your place. Not the place for you. You don't want this." "So what is the answer. What is the place for me?" "You have to be introduced." "So maybe we can find someone to introduce us." "I come here for the sports." And off he went for his ping pong game.

Martha and I got dressed and ran down to dinner early, because I wanted to get a choice table, what with one hundred and ten men to two hundred and ninety women. We got a table with four women and six men. This dentist sat between us and he said to me, "What is that you're eating?" "Chicken." "I'm having fish because I have an ulcer. I have an ulcer and I have gall bladder so I have to be careful what I eat. But I cheat. I cheat on all sides. I cheat in my marriage. I cheat on my foods. I'm a cheater." "Do you cheat with your patients?" "I'm an old pro—I'm on semi-retirement now but for many years I cheated along those lines, too. Heh heh heh." He says to Martha, "I would like to do some cheating tonight. Which one of you is going to be available?"

Just like that. Martha keeps on eating. She doesn't answer. I say, "Not her." He looks at me. "And you?" "Never. Not with a cheater." Then there was this tension at the table.

I turned to my food at that point. Breaking the silence is the voice of the woman on my right. "Chicken soup with no salt is good for ulcers." She was playing up to

the cheater. I looked at her. Her hair was up to here. Her lashes were out to here. Make-up on I could put my finger in and never get to her skin. I thought, she's desperate. I hope nobody's looking at me, wondering—. I went back to my food thinking—this is a disaster.

After dinner the dancing started out in the lobby—with records. I said, "Martha, let's go to where they're dancing." Martha said, "You go ahead. You want to dance. I don't dance." She don't swim. She don't dance. She don't go in the water. She don't play tennis. She don't do anything. She sits. I mean I was really stuck. This was a bad thing. This was terrible. I thought, I don't care if she is sitting there looking sour, I'm going to have a good time. I danced with a nice Italian man and a nice Chinese man. So I had a good time. I liked this Italian man very much. And he liked me. But he sells automobile parts. A travelling man. From New Jersey. Dollars to doughnuts that man is married. And the Chinese man was just lovely. Very nice. But all he wanted was to go to bed. You don't just go to bed. It's not all that it's about—sex. It's about communication, rapport, something. Like a friendship has to exist first.

So I got Martha who is sitting there with this mad face on her and we walked over to the entertainment about twenty feet down the road. Their big nightclub. And the entertainment was surprisingly good. A marvelous comedian—he's well known. I forget his name, and a dance team that was very smooth. They teamed up well. After that we had some coffee—it was late. There was more dancing at the

nightclub. But Martha didn't want to stay.

We went back to our cruddy little room that we shared and it was awful. I said to her, "This is a weekend? This is what you wanted to come to Audubon for?" She said, "I'm not out to meet anybody. I just wanted to get away." "You really hate your home so much that you have to get away?" She said, "I feel if I'm away for the weekend I'm enjoying myself." "But Martha, the people—the people are just awful. The women are nice—most of them—but the men are only after one

thing-you can't even talk to them."

We had one day left. I still hadn't rowed. "Martha, if you don't come row with me, I'm going to go by myself." She said, "I love the lake. That I'll do. The lake is a beautiful setting. Do you row well?" "You won't drown, don't worry." The boat man says to me, "This is the first time you're here, isn't it? I know everybody who comes here year after year. You're very different from what comes here. I like you. I've been watching you Friday, Saturday. I have a boat for you. I was waiting for you. You know, they're tearing up my part of Coney Island. You have a nice apartment?" "I have a lovely apartment. You want to move in my neighborhood?" I'm innocent. I didn't know what he meant. He says, "Look. I have about thirty thousand dollars. I'll sign it over to you. You are just the type I would like to be married to. Marry me. I'll take care of you. You'll have my social security check. You'll have my thirty thousand dollars." I said, "You're a really sweet man." He kisses me. "You're a very sweet man and you want somebody to take care of you. I understand." He said, "I'm going to be seventy in a week," but you could see he is more. He says, "Take my address. Give me your number. I'll call you. I'll make you very happy. I can make you happy in every way. Sexually, too." I tell him, "I won't give you my number, but you give me yours." "Will you call me? Will you get in touch with me?" I thought—even if we just take walks together or go to the movies what, once—twice a month? I didn't say a thing.

Martha and I are out on the lake. She says, "See—you got your first proposal! It won't take you long!" I say, "Martha, you want him, you can have him. You've got a bigger apartment." "He wants you." "Martha, what are you talking about? That man is old. He must have proposed to a million women. He tries—I'm his height—he's a little taller than me. I'm just the right height for him. He saw me playing tennis with the judge. He comes here all the time. He needs someone to take care of him in his old age." I went away from the lake feeling very upset. I cried. I cried for the women.

Late Sunday morning I saw the woman I met playing tennis the first day. "Hi, how are you?" She said, "I was looking for you." "Well, you were with somebody." "Yeah, that was a bust. You want to play tennis?" "We're going to leave soon. My friend Martha's waiting. Everything's in the car." She pleads with me. "Please—I gotta get it out of my system. Let's play tennis for a little while." So I tell Martha, "I'm going to get my racket out of the car." "You're going to play tennis now? You'll be too tired to drive." "Don't worry about that." And I went off to play tennis.

I asked this woman, "I want to know about these weekends. Do you always go?" "Listen," she said. "Let me tell you what it is. You swear—you swear to God that you'll never do it again. You went once. You had a lousy time. You don't meet anybody and that's it. You won't go anymore. Two weeks later you're back again.

You swear up and down the line."

She was a very wholesome farm type girl. I thought, boy, she lived on a farm all her life with nice rosy cheeks, the strong athletic type. I mean I really like this type. She knows where it is. She's an accountant—a CPA—goes around doing everyone's books and she's terrific.

She said, "You swear you're not going to go to these places anymore. And you're back again cuz you figure maybe you'll be the lucky one next time. Because it happens to your friends. One gets married here. One gets married there. And they're not even as good-looking as you or me." I ask her, "Is that important to you? I mean you have this great job—don't you meet people where you work?" "No. I've been working for these people since I was a kid, ever since I got my CPA." I want to know. "Is it really so important to you—getting married?" "Yes," she said, "I don't want to be alone. I just married off my son. My husband died three years ago." "Don't you have friends?" "No. They never want to do things." "Where do you live?" "In Brooklyn."

Now there's somebody I'd like to be friendly with. But Brooklyn. That's a drag with me in Queens. Even if she lived in Manhattan it would be better. She lives

way out in Sheep's Head Bay. And that's it. Then we left.

Two weeks later Martha calls. "There's a Deltan dance tonight. You want to go?" "Martha, do you realize that we've been around together to all these different places and we meet the same people. Don't you see what it is?" "Yes, but don't you think it's important for you to get out of the house and just dance. You love to dance." "No, no. As much as I love to dance it's not important to go to degrade myself. Cuz this is really degrading." "I know. I know. But it's good to get dressed up—to go out. Come with me just this one time more. I feel it's a donation to the synagogue."

All right. I stood around for quite a while, dressed very nicely. I wore my white slacks, navy blue blazer and red shirt. And just nobody, nobody came over to ask

me to dance.

There was a man I was standing next to and I admired his watch. So I thought maybe I'll mention something about his watch. Here's somebody I'd like to dance with—not too tall, not too short, attractive, grey hair, something interesting. I say, "I like that watch." He says, "You're sharp, heh? That is a nine hundred dollar watch." So I thought to myself, big deal. A nine hundred dollar watch. I say, "That's like having a Mercedes on your wrist, right?" "Yes, I would say so. I would say so." I say, Yes, so you said so and I heard you say it. So let's dance." He said, "I'm not ready yet." "You're not ready yet." I walked away and thought, I gotta get out of here. I gotta get out of here.

I had some more punch and walked to the ladies room and then out to the lobby to see what was doing there. All of a sudden I spot these four men come in. One of them looked very familiar. I thought Bip Cohen. No. how can that be Bip Cohen. Bip Cohen is married. It couldn't be Bip Cohen. Then I looked at his tummy and thought Bip Cohen, has to be. He always had that little pot hanging out over his belt, even as a young fellow. We grew up together. I know him as well as I do my own right arm. He had this little red nose and high red cheeks. He's always outdoors. And I thought, I've got to go over and talk to Bip who was squeezing the hell out of a short not even cute blond woman. They're rubbing noses. I say, "Bip?" I tapped him on the shoulder. He says, "Yeah, Bip." I say, "Bip Cohen?" He says, "Yeah, Bip Cohen. And I was hoping you wouldn't see me or wouldn't come over. What the hell are you doing here? This is not a place for you." I said, "Bip, this is a Deltan dance. I belong to the Deltan singles." "It's still not the place for you." I say, "Bip, why is it the place for you? Where's Rose?" He pulls me aside. "We had a grandchild," he says very proudly. "Yes, good luck." "I told Rose to stay in Florida for another week. What does she have to come home for. She wants to help out with the baby." I say, "That's nice. That's really nice. So what are you doing here?" "Sara, it's later than you think. It's later than you think, Sara."

"So okay, Bip, all those men who came in with you. Maybe there's someone you could introduce me to." He says, "They're married, Sara. Half the men here are married. That's what I'm telling you, this is not the place for you." "So what's the story. Where are their wives?" "Listen kid, one wife had a hysterectomy and she's doing fine. We all just went to see her in the hospital. We just left. The other one with the grey hair is supposed to be taking inventory—so he's having a little fun. He'll get home early. And the other one went to see his mother in the old age home." "So Bip you think other men here are married, too?" "Listen, kid, I know this crowd. We all come in here. We come here almost every Friday night. First time I've ever seen you here and I don't want to see you here again." "Bip, of all your friends here, do you know anybody?"

"Okay, kid, I know you're interested. The only way to meet is to be introduced. As soon as I hear something I'll let you know." So I say, "Bip, you're going to get burned." "Don't be silly. It's late—you're getting older, you want to live—you live." "Going around like this is living? This is living? Rose comes home she's got the same thing." "Yeah, but this is different, Sara. You have bread, you want sometime a little cake." He went back to his blond.

It's very very sick. It's a sick scene out there.

You know, I believe in fate. You just have to be in the right place at the right time. It's just fate. Take this woman at my school where I'm working as a secretary now. She's standing at the bus. She wants to get on. She has all her papers, she

took them home to mark, you know. And she moved in a funny way that she dropped everything. A man standing next to her helped gather up all her papers, left nothing on the street. The driver saw what had happened and waited. They ran into the bus and the man managed to pay both fares. He sat down next to her and she paid him back, thanking him profusely. Then she sighed to herself. She had gone through a bad time. He said, "What's the matter?" "It's a year today that my husband died, and I don't know, it's a bad day. It's just a bad day." He said, "Two years for me." They're married three years already.

Now the one living at Elena's house, I've known her for many years. Her husband died recently. She had to go shopping, went out with her curlers, her kerchief and an old coat. And she ran out and is walking along with her shopping cart and someone says to her, "Flo?" And she says, "Sam, what are you doing here?" "Well, we moved into the neighborhood five years ago." "How come I've never seen you before? How's your wife?" "I lost her already a couple of years ago." She said, "Well, you know, Murray died too." Married two years. Just with her curlers.

Look what happened to Marion. Lost her husband nine years ago and her sister-in-law's brother's wife died. He calls up. "Marion, I met you many times at different affairs in the family. My wife died. It would be a good idea if you and I had dinner together." Married now four years. I went to their New Year's Eve party.

So there you are. You can meet that someone standing at the bus.

I stopped going to singles dances. I stopped looking. When you're not looking, someone/somehow/somewhere will come along. I had made a whole new bunch of women friends. I decided to just have a good time with them. Whoever had an interesting vacation I went with. My bags were packed. I had marvelous marvelous trips and times and everything. I've been to California, Florida, all up and down the eastern seaboard.

One time Lily, my new friend I had met at Deltans, called me up, "I have Washington's Birthday weekend off, would you like to go to one of the hotels?" I said, "You make the arrangements." I picked her up and said, "So where are we headed?" "The Granite." That's the first time I had ever been to The Granite. We had a marvelous marvelous weekend, went tobogganing and ice skating. At dinner I sat next to this attractive older man who was telling me about his daughter who is blind. I had noticed him over the weekend because he was a terrific dancer. I was dying to dance with him. He and I were having the best conversation, about our travels, our children, sports, other interests we had in common. I said to him, "I've noticed, you're a very good dancer. I love to dance, too." He says, "Thank you," gets up, and leaves the table. Just like that. For no reason. I thought, what's his problem. He really had me fooled.

Well, the next time Lily and I went back to The Granite, I said I'm not out here to meet anyone. I came for the sports. I'm going rowing, I'm playing tennis and I'm swimming. Lily was with her friend Andy. Andy from Buffalo. And I shared a room with my new friend, Irene. Irene is very attractive and we were sitting at a very very good table with a retired policeman, a retired detective, a retired, I think he was an accountant, he was also a lawyer, and we had a wonderful time. I went horseback riding and when I came back I took a shower then came down poolside.

Andy said, "They're dancing over there. Why don't you go over there, maybe you'll meet somebody." I say, "Andy, no way. I didn't come here to meet anyone. I

just want to go swimming." Well, he kept saying, "Go over there to the dancing. Go over. Try. You might meet somebody just for the weekend." By that time I was bold. I knew how to handle them. I knew what to say. I knew how to talk. I went right through the pool, wet, and pulled myself up right out at the dance part. I see this tall, good-looking, grey-haired man with a familiar face standing there. The dancing stopped. There was a lull. I said to him, "I know you. Where from? I definitely know you." "I beg your pardon." "Look this is not a come-on. That's not my schtick. I do know you." He says, "Well, I don't know you." "What's your name?" He says, "Art." I say, "You're right. I don't know an Art. I definitely don't know an Art. I'm sorry." He says, "What's yours?" "Sara." He says, "Oh, yes, I know you. You were here in the winter. You sat at my table." Then I remembered he was that very good dancer. I say, "Oh, yes, that's right. You have the child who is blind." "Yes." "I told you you were a very good dancer and you said 'thank you' and walked away. Now it's my turn. So long, buddy." And I turned around and dove back in the pool.

He came after me, running by the side of the pool. Calling down to me, "Look, I'm sorry if I came off rude, but will you dance with me now?" I shout up, "No, absolutely not. I'm busy swimming, have to get in my laps. Besides, you'd have too good a time dancing with me." I'm at the other end of the pool by now climbing the steps and he's standing there with a towel. "Come on," he says, "Come on. None of that talk." Well I dried off and he danced with me. We really went to town. The rhumba, the cha-cha, the tango, the waltz. When the music stopped he asked where I was sitting. "Come on, you'll meet my friends." And I took him over and introduced him to the whole bunch. Lily and Andy, Irene, and all those men we

were sitting with, the retired this and the retired that.

Andy says to me, "Sara, he's a very nice man. Invite him up to our room for Happy Hour tonight." I say, "No way, he's too old for me, he's got a hearing aid and right now I've got to sign up for tennis tomorrow morning. Besides I travelled light this weekend. I don't have a thing to wear." Andy says, "Invite him. You'll have somebody for the weekend." I say, "All right, you invite him. I'm not inviting him." So Andy goes over and invites him. Andy is a generous, warm person. He is just one helluva good guy.

Irene and I get to Lily and Andy's room and the whole bunch is there. I wore my white suit with a chartreuse blouse. In walks Art. "You look stunning," he says. I answer him in Mae West, "Thank you, I always look stunning." We had a lovely evening. He was quiet in front of everyone, shy I thought. When we had dinner he changed his table to ours. We moved over, made room for him. Lily whispered to

me, "Sara, he's a very nice man. Cultivate him."

We were all together that whole weekend. And Art says to me at the end of the weekend, "Can I have your address?" "No, I don't give my address to anyone." He says, "Don't you want to see me again? I could see you in the city. I like you, Sara." I said, "I'll give you my telephone number, and you call me. I don't give my address out." He said, "You pass my place when you go home. I'll pay all the tolls if you drop me off."

It was pleasant going home. He did pay all the tolls and for the gas. And that was it. He thanked me profusely for taking him home. When I walked in my door the phone was ringing. "Did you get home all right? When can I see you?" We started seeing each other on Sundays. After a few weeks I said, "I can't make any more

Sunday appointments. I can only make them on Saturdays." You see I was testing. Is he married, too? So we started going out on Saturdays. We got together with his friends and my new friends and my old friends from my first marriage. It was very comfortable. No longer an outsider. No longer alone. No longer an outcast. No longer having to look. Or not to look. It was very comfortable. Like an old shoe. And we had such good times. Except twice when he flew off the handle because I didn't want to cancel Saturday night dinner engagements so he could watch his ball games. That's why he had taken me out on Sundays to begin with. But the flowers, and gifts and promises, went on for one year. And all the time he was begging me to marry him.

What would it be like living with Art day in, day out? I knew I cared about him, yes. Very much. His smile—dimples right here. But the spark—I asked myself, do I

feel a spark? Is this love?

It was hard. Especially seeing all my new friends getting married, one by one. The next thing I knew even Martha got married. I said, "Martha, are you happy?" She said, "Let me put it this way, I'm not unhappy. But I'm sick and disgusted with his strict kosher laws which I didn't know about before I got married." "What do you mean, strict kosher laws?" "Sara, not only two sets of dishes, two sets of towels for the dishes, I have to keep the soaps separate." "Why, why did you let yourself in for this? Why didn't you just say, I'm not kosher, this is it." Martha says, "I didn't think it was important enough." Then I said, "Martha, you must love him. You are doing what he wants you to do because you love him so much." "No, Sara, I'm doing what he wants me to do just to keep peace. I don't want to fight over anything."

Well, I was very surprised to hear that she will clam up to keep peace. What kind of peace? You have to bottle all that inside? Now Lily and Andy get along beautifully. He can't do enough for her. He bought her a new car. And you'd never recognize Lily. She let her hair go grey. She got heavy. But they're happy. She's a good

friend. Lily and Andy were after me to marry Art.

I had a talk with my Rabbi. "Sara, it's nice to have somebody in the house. Why are you so ambivalent?" "I'm not sure what I want." "You're getting older," he said. "You can't be by yourself. It's a couple world, Sara. It's a couple world."

I was number eight in our crowd to get married. The wedding was a very touching affair. My daughters Beth and Sherry were trying to hold back their tears. I don't really know if they were moved about what I was doing or reminded of their daddy. Because I'm thinking to myself while I was standing there with all these prayers from the Rabbi and the whole ceremony, I'm thinking to myself, what am I doing? I wanted to laugh because I thought it was ridiculous. I thought, now I'm getting stupid, I'm getting silly, I'm getting hysterical, emotional. I see everybody is looking down with the tears. Even my friend Lily. I wanted to laugh. I had all I could do to keep my mouth closed and not show my teeth. I thought I was getting a type of hysterics because somewhere deep down I didn't want it. Then I thought, oh, no, I'm wrong. This is what I should be doing. They all got married. All my friends got married. They wanted me to get married, too. I thought to myself, I better calm down. I tried very hard just to calm down. And I did.

Art was wearing a very nice bluish-grey jacket and light tan slacks. I was in that flowered print cool summer thing. It was early June. I didn't buy it for the wedding, I had worn it only once before for somebody else's affair. No one in my

crowd had seen the dress so I wore it to my wedding.

Everybody kissed us at the end and wished us luck. The Rabbi stared at me.

"Well, you feel good now?" I hugged him and didn't answer.

Art and I went on a two week honeymoon to Florida. We met his sister and her husband. They're lovely people. I introduced him to my cousins and they all made us feel very welcome. And then we spent one week in the mountains back up to The Granite where we had met. That was good until near the end of the week at dinner. See, Art is not allowed to have lox or things like that. I whispered to him, "Don't eat lox." He hollered out in front of everybody, "Don't tell me what to eat. I'm a big boy now." With that I got up and walked away. This was the first time he opened up in front of people like that.

There were two men I had known for some time at our table. They had wished us luck and so on. One of them follows me. They were brothers, bachelors. I didn't know their story. Rube follows me and says, "So let me tell you like a friend." I say, "Yea, tell me like a friend. What do you got to say?" "I heard what happened." "Who didn't?" He said, "You listen to me. It's not the first man you married, it's the second marriage. He's an older man. Don't ever look at him when he eats. Turn your head away. At home you cook and he eats what you put in front of him. When you're out, whatever he orders, make believe you don't see." Rube is a short man, maybe two inches shorter than I am. I leaned over and kissed him. "Rube," I said, "Rube, that's the best thing you could have told me. You just opened a brand new door."

The rest of the summer was all right. We were at the pool a lot, we ate out and I looked the other way. He ordered what he was supposed to when he saw I wouldn't get involved. But after the summer things started to happen. Art had moved into my apartment, my home for thirty years. Everything was to be shared even. The rent, the household, the food, the car expense. Everything. He still went out to work at the coat company. I still worked as a school secretary. We were home having dinner. He waves the phone bill. "It's too high. What are these long distance calls?" I had started phoning his daughter in Chicago once a week. He yelled, "Don't call my daughter." I said, "That comes from the house money, Art." I couldn't believe it. He had been so generous before we were married. Now it was Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde. "I like to call your daughter. She likes to hear from us,

how you're doing."

He was sitting at the kitchen table. I was standing at the sink doing dishes. He says, "Listen." Bangs his flat hand on the table. Bang. Bang. "I want you to know in this house I'm the boss and what I say goes." My back was to him. I turned around. I faced him. Then I banged on the table. "Now you listen here." Bang. Bang. "Don't you ever bang on this table. That's number one. Number two. There's no boss in this house. Everything here is equal. And what you say may not go with me. The next time you bang on the table and tell me that you're the boss, you'll have to pay me a big salary." He sat and stared at me with his mouth open. He says, "That's not how it is supposed to be." I say, "Oh, I get it. I see what it is. You think I'm supposed to be like Ethel. If that's how you spoke to your first wife, she had to take it. She had a blind child at home. I don't. And I don't take. I am not Ethel. It's a new world and this is a new marriage and we can be a new way with each other." Then I look up at the ceiling and say, "Okay, Ethel, that was one for you. May you rest in peace." He says to me, "You're nuts." He

never banged on my table again.

But this was a terrible situation. He couldn't change how he had been with Ethel. I had had freedom with my first husband, God rest his soul. Art, I chauffered around, cooked for him, cleaned, did his laundry. That I didn't mind. But Saturdays he sat in front of the TV watching ballgames and turned off his hearing aid. He was always turning off his hearing aid so I had to shout. He never wanted to go out any more. And we were a terrific dance team. What do I need this for? You want to know lonely? This was more lonely than being alone.

I sounded out all my newly married friends. Ruby says her problem is that she cannot retire because Murray is retired. She said, "I can't have him home all day

and be around him."

I said to Eunice, "Are you happy?" "What do you mean am I happy? What's happy? With my first husband I was happy. Now it's a marriage of convenience." I said, "That's some hell of an answer."

I talked to Lily, and then to my daughters and they saw how upset I was. They

encouraged me to go my own way.

I made up my mind. "Art. I want a divorce." He yelled, "Divorce! What are you talking divorce!" "Art, we are not compatible. We made a mistake. It's not the end of the world. We just aren't each other's type." "Not each other's type! Not each other's type! There's no such thing as divorce!"

I am free again. My old married friends have dropped me because I'm no longer with Art. They can't understand why I divorced. But I tell them, toast and tea alone is better than steak and aggravation. Lily says, "Sara, as long as you're happy, that's what counts." It doesn't bother me to be without a husband. Thank God, it doesn't bother me.

The Deltans want me back on the Board and I'm getting active in a lot of organizations. I haven't had so many friends on my own terms since 1-A. Some nights I just take the phone off the hook so I can have dinner in peace and quiet and watch the news, read the paper.

So I say, "Mazel-tov, Sara, and poo-poo-poo."

#### **CURTAIN**

#### contributors

MEENA ALEXANDER is the mother of an infant daughter and a six-year-old son. She is a poet from Kerala, the Southern-most state of India. Her work has been published in numerous literary journals and a new volume of her poetry entitled *House of a Thousand Doors* is forthcoming from Three Continents Press (Washington, D.C.)

MARI ALSCHULER received an MFA in writing from Columbia University. Her poems have appeared in American Poetry Review, Shenandoah, No Apologies, and elsewhere. She is currently completing a double masters' in organizational psychology and psychological counseling at Teachers College.

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YOLANDA BLANCO belongs to the generation of Nicaraguan women poets who started writing in the 70's. She has published *Penqueo en Nicaragua* (1981) and *Aposentos* (1985). She is currently in Jersey City collaborating as a writer in a dance-theater piece about Nicaraguan myths.

CHARLOTTE BUNCH, feminist writer, organizer and speaker, has been an activist since the 1960's and presently works on issues of global feminism. She has edited *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, seven feminist anthologies and a collection of her own essays, *Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action*, to be published by St. Martin's Press in June.

JOSELY CARVALHO, a Brazilian artist living in New York, has shown in many galleries internationally including the Museum of Modern Art in Bahia, Brazil; the Potter House Gallery in Washington, D.C.; and the Yvonne Seguy Gallery in New York City. She has received grants from NYSCA, the NEA and the Organization of American States.

CHERYL CLARKE (b. 1947, Wash. D.C.) is a member of the editorial collective of *Conditions* magazine, which just completed its 13th issue. Her most recent book of poems is *Living as a Lesbian* (Firebrand Books, 1986). She is a member of the Board of Directors of New York Women Against Rape. She lives and writes in Jersey City, N.J.

MARION COHEN is a "woman mathematician" and is presently facilitating a Math Anxiety Clinic at Temple University. Her first book was a collection of "math poems," and her other books include three poetry chapbooks, two anthologies, and a trilogy diary of her experiences with newborn death, subsequent pregnancy, and subsequent Cesarean birth.

CLARE COSS is a writer and psychotherapist currently working on her first novel. Her plays include Lillian Wald: At Home on Henry Street (New Federal Theater), Growing Up Gothic (Theater for the New City), The Star Strangled Banner (Berkshire Theater Festival Barn.)

DONNA DECKER is a performance poet, coordinator of the Harbor Series poetry readings (Staten Island), co-author of *Three Thirds*, and past editor of the college of Staten Island's *All Ways A Woman*.

MYRIAM DÍAZ-DIOCARETZ: Born 1951 in Chile. Poet, critic, translator. Ph.D in Comparative Literature, SUNY at Stony Brook. Her work has appeared in several magazines, including 13th Moon, Letras Femeninas, Third Woman, as well as in other journals in Spain, Latin-America and the U.S. She is author of Que no se pueden decir. She has translated Adrienne Rich: Poemas 1951-81 which was published in Spain. She is currently writing on Black American women poets and editing an anthology of contemporary American women poets in translation.

MURIEL DIMEN is a psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City and a professor of anthropology at Lehman College CUNY. She is author of *The Anthropological Imagination* and a long time feminist activist.

PAULA FINN was born in 1960 in Providence, Rhode Island. She is a poet who lives in Brooklyn. She works with Art Against Apartheid and teaches English as a Second Language.

CAROL GINANDES works as an artist and psychologist in Watertown, Massachusetts. She has had solo exhibitions of photographs in Boston, New York and Lafin America, received a Fulbright Grant to photograph in Chile (1969-70), and has published a book of photographs about women, *Of Women Born* (Pentacle Press, 1976).

JANICE GOULD (Maidu) was born in 1949, grew up in Berkeley, has a B.A. in Linguistics and is writing her thesis on Native American Women Poets. Working on her M.A. English, she is employed as a secretary in the Native American Studies Department.

TERRY HAUPTMAN is a poet-painter currently living in Minnesota. She has three books of poems: Masquerading in Clover, with hand-painted plates (Four Zoas.); Rattle, with an introduction by Meridel LaSueur (Cardinal Press.); To Ruffle with Wings of Intimacy (forthcoming.) She is assistant editor at Sing Heavenly Muse.

KATHLEEN SHAYE HILL: I'm an enrolled member of the Klamath tribe; by blood quantum Klamath/ Paiute/White. I have two terrific children. I was scheduled to start law school, but the words of a former writing teacher, words once content with merely nibbling at my brain, suddenly began gnawing. Her words? "Sometimes you write a story because if you don't tell it, no one will." That pretty well says it. I was first published in *Gathering Ground*, new writing and art by Northwest Coast women of color.

GLORIA HULL is a teacher, poet, and critic whose work on Black women writers has been widely published. Her poems have appeared in *Women: A Journal of Liberation, Callaloo, Conditions, Chrysalis, Obsidian,* and other journals.

GALE JACKSON is a writer and librarian who lives in Brooklyn. She is co-director of Art Against Apartheid.

KARLA JACKSON-BREWER is an adjunct professor in women's studies at Rutgers University, a consultant in the area of sexual assault, and a psychotherapist in private practice. She has published in *Aegis Magazine*, *Gap Tooth Girlfriends*; an anthology and has co-authored an article on internalized homophobia. She is the mother of Jamal and Sadira and spends much of her time juggling needs, mending battle tears, laughing, loving, and scratching out a living in NYC.

TERRI L. JEWELL: I am a 30-yr-old Black Lesbian Feminist poet/writer whose work has found shelter in *Conditions, Sinister Wisdom* and many others. I want to be a gerontologist when I grow up.

BARRIE KARP is a painter living in New York. Her work can be seen at the L. Rastovski Gallery in New York through February 15. Recently her work has also been shown at A.I.R. Gallery in New York and at the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, N.Y. She teaches philosophy and feminist theory at Parsons School of Design, The New School, The School of Visual Arts and Adelphi University.

MELANIE KAYE/KANTROWITZ is a Jewish lesbian, born and raised in Brooklyn. She edits *Sinister Wisdom*, has recently co-edited—with Irena Klepfisz—*The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, and her writing is widely published in the feminist, lesbian and Jewish progressive press. She has been involved in political struggles for more than her adult life. She teaches writing and women's studies in the Adult Degree Program of Vermont College.

HELENE KENDLER is a poet and writer based in New York City. She is a former Associate Director of Cummington Community of the Arts in Massachusetts, and has been a recipient of a N.Y. State CAPS fellowship for poetry and the Whiteside Poetry Award.

NANCY KRICORIAN was born and raised in Watertown, Massachusetts. She is currently enrolled in the M.F.A. program in writing at Columbia University, where she works as a teaching assistant in composition and women's studies.

DONNA LANGSTON is a poet and an activist in the Women's Movement and Labor Movement who has worked a variety of jobs, including clerical, waitressing, as an electrician assistant, oil refinery worker, and in the home. Her poetry and articles have appeared in numerous periodicals and journals including *Plexus*, *Northwest Passage*, and *Off Our Backs*. Her book of poems, *Kaida*, will be published in the summer of 1984.

REBECCA LEWIN is a fiction writer, poet and essayist. She won the 1985 PEN Syndicated Fiction Competition and has published in *Newsday, The San Francisco Chronicle, The New York Native, Womanews, Voices for Peace Anthology, Jewish Daily Forward* and other periodicals.

MEREDITH LUND is a painter who lives in New York and has had several one-woman shows. She is currently showing at the Ave. B Gallery in the East Village.

CYNTHIA MACADAMS' two published works of photography are *Emergence* and *Rising Goddess*. She is completing a book on *The Bowery* and a book on the pyramids of Egypt and Guatemala. She has had one woman shows at the Women's Building in Los Angeles and the Neikrug Gallery, Parsons Gallery, Womanbooks and A Photographer's Place in New York.

MARGO MACHIDA was born in Hilo, Hawaii. She received an NEA grant in 1983-84 and an Artist-in-Residence Grant, NYSCA in 1984-85. She has had many solo exhibitions. Upcoming exhibitions include "Race and Representation," a group show at Hunter Art Gallery, February, 1987; a solo exhibition at the Jerry Clifford Gallery, Bronx Museum of the Arts, September, 1987; and "Mind's Eye," at the Asian Arts Institute, March 1987.

BARBARA MORAFF did the research and developed the nutrition program for people whose bodies cannot metabolize any food nutrients and to promote this wrote *The Cookbook for Kids Who Have Cystic Fibrosis*, in 1975. She has published seven small press books of poetry since 1976—the most recent being *Contra La Violencia* from White Pine Press.

MARY MORAN (Metis). Born in 1946 in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Lesbian. Vietnam era veteran, She lives in Madison, Wisconsin.

HILDA MORLEY has written poetry since the age of nine. Her poems have appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal, Black Mountain Review, American Poetry Review, The Nation, New Directions Annual #27, Hudson Review, Poetry, Mother Jones and Heresies.* Her books include: A *Blessing Outside Us* (Pourboire Press, 1976); What Are Winds & What Are Waters (Matrix Press, 1983); To Hold In My Hand; Selected Poems 1955-1983 (Sheep Meadow Press 1984).

EILEEN O'NEILL is an assistant professor of philosophy at Queens College and The Graduate Center of CUNY. Her teaching and publications are in the areas of the history of modern philosophy, feminist theory, and aesthetics. She has a Ph.D in philosophy from Princeton and has been enrolled in the Ph.D program in art history at The Graduate Center of CUNY.

MARGARET RANDALL is currently fighting the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to be able to stay in the U.S. With a group of prominent writers and PEN's American Center, she is challenging the ideological exclusion clause of the infamous McCarran-Walter Act. A writer and photographer, she teaches Women's and American Studies at the University of New Mexico. She is the author of over forty books, her latest being *Albuquerque: Coming Home* published by New Star Books.

PAULA ROSS, a former television and newspaper reporter, was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1947. She has been co-director of Women's Voices Creative Writing Workshop, a residential writing program for women, since 1982. She is the editor of two anthologies, *My Story's On: Ordinary Women/Extraordinary Lives* (Common Differences Press) and *Across the Generations* (Educators' Improvement). Her fiction and reviews have appeared in *Coming Up! Conditions: Nine*, and *Onyx*. She is currently working as a freelance writer and editor in Berkeley, Ca.

MAUREEN SEATON will be doing a residency at the Ucross Foundation, Wyoming for the month of March and has been published in *Cottonwood, Poet Lore, Negative Capability, Mississippi Review. Black Maria, Rebirth of Artemis,* and the *Croton Review* among others.

CHARLOTTE WATSON SHERMAN is a Seattle-bred poet, mother, and all around vision chaser. She has had poetry published in *The Black Scholar, Obsidian, Backbone, The Written Arts*, and *Gathering Ground: New Writing and Art by Northwest Women of Color.* She is the author of *Nia and the Golden Stool*, a children's book forthcoming from Winston-Derek Publishers and *So Much Shattered Glass: Violence Against Black Women*.

SUSAN SHERMAN, a poet, is the editor of IKON magazine. She was awarded a CAPS poetry award 1976/77 and received a CCLM editors' grant (1985) and an editor's award from NYSCA (1986). She has published three books of poetry, a translation of a Cuban play, *Shango de Ima* (Doubleday) and has just completed a new manuscript of poetry. She teaches at Parsons School of Design.

LINDA SMUKLER, a Jewish lesbian writer, grew up in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio. She now lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. and works as a typesetter.

ANITA STECKEL, an NEA recipient for painting 1983/84, trained in NY scholarship schools (Music & Art High School and Cooper Union), and has exhibited in 18 museums nationally and internationally. Her work was included in *Documenta* in Germany and *The Bienal* in Columbia, S.A. where she was one of 10 artists representing the United States. She teaches at the Art Students League and Parsons School of Design.

LEE STOLIAR's work has appeared in numerous exhibits including "Feminists and Misogynists Together at Last," Center of Contemporary Arts, Seattle, Washington; "Beyond Clay," Queens College, New York; "Small Works," Washington Square East Galleries and a solo show, "Erotic Terra Cotta," Avenue B Gallery, both in New York City.

AMBER COVERDALE SUMRALL is of Irish, Dutch, and Mohawk ancestry. Her work has appeared in With The Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology, A Gathering of Sprit, The Greenfield Review, Sinister Wisdom, and others. She is co-editor of Touching Fire: An Anthology of Erotic Writing By Women (forthcoming) and lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains close to the earth.

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DEBRA J. VETTERMAN born in 1955, got her M.F.A. in fine arts from the University of New Mexico. She has shown her work in several galleries in Albuquerque where she lives. She is currently working on a series of drawings called "Small Mysteries."

RHODA WALLER is a writer who lives in New York City.

YVONNE ZIPTER, still contemplating reality even after getting a degree in psychology, also does cartoons and writes advertising copy and fiction. Her poetry has been published in such periodicals as Black Maria and Womanspirit. She is currently working on a young adult fantasy novel titled The Unfolding of Rin. (Sometimes there's a fine line between fantasy and reality!)

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Many of the designs in this issue came from *Decorative Art of the Southwestern Indians*, Dorothy Smith Sides. Dover Publications Inc.

