

CHILD OF MYSELF



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CHILD OF MYSELF

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This book is dedicated
to my father, who compromised
his dreams that I might realize mine.

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of
Man."

Genesis I: 23

from cavities of bones
spun
from caverns of air
i, woman - bred of man
taken from the womb of sleep;
i, woman that comes
before the first.

to think second
to believe first
a mistake
erased by the motion of years.
i, woman, i
can no longer claim
a mother of flesh
a father of marrow
I, Woman must be
the child of myself.

"There are two things I've got a
right to, and these are death
or liberty. One or the other
i mean to have."

Harriet Tubman

Brother

I don't want to hear
about
how my real enemy
is the system.
i'm no genius,
but i do know
that system
you hit me with
is called
a fist.

Sometimes my husband
acts
just like a man...

dishes are evil / you know
they can destroy the spirit...

Washing dishes should
be outlawed

paper plate nirvana!

long live dixie cups!

...tomorrow i am going to lose
my temper -

i will destroy all the dishes
that i missed last week -

Fuller Brush Day

Here you are, lady,
a year's supply of room spray,
& I watch myself
walking down
my hall,
spraying for a year.
Spraying for a year,
spray here - spray there
walking down my hall
spraying room spray,
An artificial forest
wiping out city smells.
Artificial forest,
minus birds
minus squirrels,
minus dew
minus--
spraying for a year.

If you run out before
a year's time
we'll give you another bottle
Another bottle
a full
definite
permanent year's bottle
permanent year
365 1/4 days
no time given
to holidays

Fuller Brush 2

one year,
spray for a year
phony forest
for a year
forest in my kitchen
forest in my toilet
forest in my cat box
a full time-
real life forest
smelling type year.
walking down my halls
spraying for a year
365 1/4 days
of spray
spray
spray
& I bought it.



To see a man cry -
is like watching animals
in a zoo,
say
the elephant,
the baby elephant
whose trunk is
too short
or my arm
isn't long enough
and the peanuts
won't quite reach
but fall among husks
like your tears
mating with mine
in frustration

Even in our worst times
some part of us -
finds each other.

You can't be sure of anything these days.

you meet a really far out man -
tells you,
he's been on his own for years
opens car doors for you
carries packages for you
protects you from evil doers
Says he wants an intelligent, creative
woman to be his partner in life.

you marry and find
the dude is
too weak to pick up a dish
too dumb to turn on a burner
too afraid to do laundry
too tense to iron a shirt
& to top the whole thing off -
he tries to cover his incompetence,
by telling YOU -
it's women's work.

You can't be sure of anything these days.

"a going out or going forth;
departure."

Exodus (To my husbands, lovers)

Trust me no more -
Our bed is unsafe.
Hidden within folds of cloth
a cancerous rage -

i will serve you no more
in the name of wifely love
i'll not masturbate your pride
in the name of wifely loyalty

Trust me no more
Our bed is unsafe
Hidden within folds of cloth
a desperate slave

You dare to dismiss my anger
call it woman's logic
You dare to claim my body
call it wifely duty

Trust me no more
Your bed is unsafe
Rising from folds of cloth -

In English Lit.,
they told me
Kafka was good
because he created
the best nightmares ever-
I think I should
go find that professor
& ask why
we didn't study
the S.F. Police Dept.

My heart is fresh cement,
Still able to mark on,
but in short time,
No,

I will not dry,
covering streets of men
with hate.

BLOW HOT SOUL SISTER,

My breath leaves me -
arid words crack,
tumble, to the floor
like spilled salt.

Hate - Kill - hate - kill

That's primitive -

Yes, primitive,

Be

Run naked thru jungles,

run

run,

wallow in trampled grass,

trampled,

run,

be, primitive

like sex -

filthy,

sweaty, be

hate,

my guts ache

KEEP your guns,

or you die first run

kill, hate, run,

killhaterundie

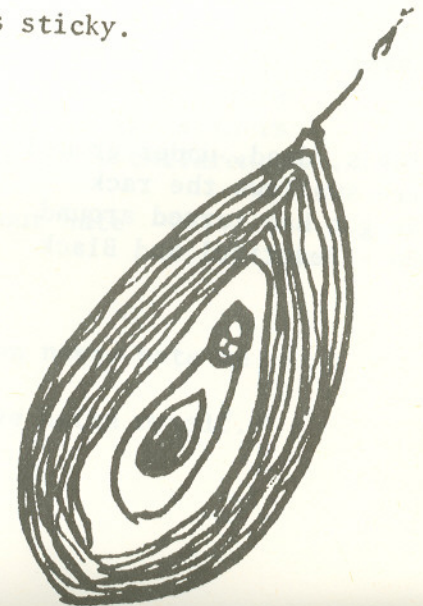
primitive/free

hate

kill

NO!

wet grass is sticky.



"What are you, Michael?"

"Black and Beautiful."

For Michael on his third birthday.

A distant time passed
Men chained back to back
Destined pain by cast
Slaves - night men - black

Overseers of then & tomorrow
Families born into a pack
Believing - that they borrow
Slaves - dead men - black

Hurt - doubters of the lie
Death the only fact
Teach the son to die
Slaves - free men - black

Slaves, dead, under ground
Fire swallows the rack
The gun has turned around
MEN - Beautiful and Black

For Donna

Somewhere you live
and i
am many years away,
no longer a frighten child
capable only of giving birth.

i wonder of your mother

not me -

for i have never washed you
never fed you
never touched you.

If she tells you of me,
will you understand?

understand my choice =

give away a part of myself
to save a part of myself

If she tells you of me,

will you hate me?

i know hate.
i know the hate of your father,
i know the hate of the mothers -
who kept their children,

i will accept your hate

but my child,

you can never hate me

as much as I have hated myself.

Dialogue

Mother, dear mother, I'm dying,
People are frowning at me,
I spend my time now, crying,
I don't know what to be.

Child, dear child, I'm sad,
To know you've gone astray,
Beatniks, you know, are bad,
I hope you find the way.

Mother, dear mother, I'm frightened,
They're dropping bombs about my head,
I'm afraid to bother to make a friend,
For I'm sure she'd wind up dead.

Child, dear child, you're silly,
The bombs are for the enemy,
And every good person is willing,
To help keep our country free.

Mother, dear mother, I'm passed,
Working my whole life away,
Trying to join a higher class,
& living in utter decay.

* Child, dear child, I must,
Show you the way to God,
First, you learn to trust,
& stop doing things that are odd.

Mother, dear mother, are you blind?
You've seen nothing I've said,
What will you do when you find,
Your child has fallen down dead?

Child, dear child, I'll buy,
A large casket made of gold,
I'll sit beside you and cry,
& pray to God for your soul.

"Cursed be Canaan;
a slave of slaves
shall he be to his
brothers."

Genesis 9: 25

A FAMILY TREE

Pitch sun-child drowns in the Mississippi,
washes away chains of loneliness, floats
a drum beat on the Nile.

Daughter of Ham lies on a church floor;
filled in orgasm with her Maker,
a spent lover ignorant of a hard bed.

The sperm of a million nights
sings loud over the southern skies;
- Sirens to a nation's conscience.

A babe of illusion has been born.
She will tell the world of rainbows;
And kiss the holes in its eyes.

goat child



I. 1944 - 1956

"you were a mistake"
my mother told me
ever since i've been
trying to make up.
couldn't really imagine
her/him in bed &
me coming 4 yrs after
the last sister
& to make things worse
i come blasting in
2 months too soon.
maybe the war did it
& to top the whole thing off
i'm the fourth girl
& was my father pissed.
caught pneumonia &
got hung up in incubator
for three months
finally made it out,
but the bed was too big
so my sister lost her doll bed.
another enemy quickly made.
& my old man being typical
spade businessman
too much credit - too little capital
losses his shop, &
we move to what is now
suburbs of Houston only
it had weeds and space
move to our own home
away from two-story brick
project where i found my
cousin's condom & blew it up
& good-bye cousins to
one room - tin roof playhouse
with tarzan making beams,
tin #2 washtub, maggot-filled

outhouse and super rats/
but i did try to please then.
football, baseball, fishing,
best yard cutter on the block.
two guns hanging from my hips
in the best Texas tradition
& me bad pistol pete holding
up all visitors for nickels
& wiping out roaches faster
than the durango kid ever could.
but even the best cowboys need learning
so they herded me back to school
but i remembered nursery school
& nurses with long needles
hell no i won't go,
but i went & had to leave
my guns/ could only take
my boots & the teacher
300 lbs. of don'ts
& i cried thru a whole day
of turtles, lizards, pretty
pictures, crayons, & glue.
came back all ready to
hang up the second day,
but the teacher showed
us her paddle - heavy
wood, hand fitted paddle
with holes drilled to
suck the flesh/ no tears
so i settled down &
fought my way thru first grade
defending my right to
wear cowboy boots even if
i was a girl which no one
had bothered to tell me
about at home / swung
into 2nd grade right into
economics/ 50¢ notebook
which mother couldn't

buy that day & i couldn't
tell the teacher that rap
so i copped one from the
doctor's son who could
afford it easy, but he
had numbered his pages
& i couldn't explain why
my book began on pg. 9
& the teacher calls
my sister who had been
her star #1 pupil
four years ago who
immediately denies that
her mother had bought it
& there i was a caught
thief at seven years old.
conditions improved/
looked like i was going
to make it till 5th grade
& i got beat all day
for stealing a 15¢ pack
of paper which i didn't,
but couldn't say because the
girl that did was too big
& the teacher got religion
& bought me steak sandwiches
from then on & even put me
in the glee club which was
indeed a most generous act.
& 6th grade was worse cause
oldest sister #2 had been
there & the teacher had
a good memory for bad ones.
& it wasn't until
i recited the night
before christmas
three times on our
class program that
she forgave me

II.

the goat left this child
me still trying to butt
my way in or out
& i came home dripping
blood & panic rode in
on my shoulders.
her slipped to the store
returned clutching a
box of kotex in a sack
twice as large.
"now you can have babies,
so keep your panties up"
& i couldn't see the
connection between me &
babies cause i wasn't
even thinking of marriage
& that always came first.
& him having to admit that
i really was a girl &
all of a sudden no more
football, not even touch
or anything & now getting
angry because i still
didn't like dolls &
all this time me not knowing
that the real hang up
was something called virginity
which i had already lost
2 years ago to a really
hard up rapist that i
never could tell my parents
about, not really knowing what
had happened but somehow
feeling it would not be
to my advantage.
twelve years old
& in southern baptists
tradition that meant
the leaving of childhood
& the latest acceptable
time to go to God
so with pleas of the
family image ringing

in my ears/ i went
baptism/ no evil spirit
left/ just cold & wet
waiting to be struck
down for fraud
& now mickey - a
baptism present to
replace delmonte
who replaced scotty
who replaced queen
who went mad and
ran thru the streets
foaming with me
climbing fences to
cut her off at the pass
but mickey a pup
already at my knees
orange, blue tongued
chow who ate on his
trainer who played with
his food and him brings
the victor to me/
scared but even more
afraid of it being
known & mickey just
as afraid as me, but
we learned and i
unchained him &
took the christmas
bike and rode free
miles and miles
& mickey running
ahead challenging
any one or dog to
get too close.
the goat came charging back
& my sisters could no
longer tell me
& the fights won in the day
lost when him came
at night, but renewed
each day with each new welt
& the boys at school
learned that him was crazy

& off to the jr. prom
with the faggot in the
church choir/ the only
acceptable male other
than him & the hate
chickens, ducks &
rabbits who ate their
young when i forgot
to put in more salt and
beatings and the volleyball
team i almost made varsity
but the gym floor & stitches
& better grades to apologize
pajama parties & mothers
who knew to go to bed
dirty jokes that i
didn't quite understand
& beer and drunkenness
the friend who always
imitated me clomping
the cha cha & never
saw my pain/ horns
shrank until senior
year & debate champion
who really wanted to
write but more afraid
of the coach who
knew i was the next
great spade lawyer
& failed the only
boy i ever loved to
make sure i didn't
get married/ her
pissed because i didn't get the
scholarship/ the big one
me who never told of
the little one that
would have kept me
in texas/ new pastures
for the goat.

OUT

run to california
& golden streets
& big money



& freedom to go
anywhere & not being
served in new mexico
or arizona/ not stopping
to record that &
california streets
reeked of past glories
and wine and blood
and this brave young
goat blasting full
steam into everything
breaking the landlady's
window while showing
a young delinquent
a backhand & running
like hell; laughing
till it hurt &
his ole lady was
paying me to keep him out
of trouble
college and the german
who didn't want me
to know his language
& decided maybe adolph
wasn't so great after
all.
journalism
a friend who
cut her forearms
to commit suicide
& me offering to help
her do it right
& retired lady colonel
who didn't think i
liked her class &
this young beast
emphatically affirmed
her / journalism "C"
a little dark buddha
walked in with folder
"i'd like to see more
of your writing/ me
awed - a man - who
knew about the goat.

III. 1962 - 1966

"I am a man,"
the buddha said-
come with me &
i will show you
the ways of woman.
come with me &
i will show you
the world of being -
the world of pain
the world of joy
the world of hate
the world of love
come walk with me
i will show you
why? - you are.
this goat-child charged
muscles tensed,
leaped, trampled
into a new time
a time of talk
a time of wine
parties & me
not knowing the words,
the gestures,
not knowing
history or heritage,
not knowing
the liars or their lies,
but sensing, somewhere
my head - hooded
allowed to breathe,
but not to see-
a blind goat charging
"I am a man,
the buddha said,
come with me &
i will show you
the ways of woman."
this goat saw & felt
the blood run,
leave my body-
i could not find the eyes,

no heart, no limbs
only blood, deep dark
blood that was life
that was dead -
scraped away
with a surgeon's knife.
scraped into regret
scraped into pain
non-existent,
but real, real!
and the herds
herds of goats
herds of sheep
& the shepherds-
give me your milk
give me your wool
& we will feed you
we will protect you
the shepards came
& taught me skills
to provide for them.
"come with me &
i will show you
the ways of woman"
& i learned
i learned hate
i learned jealousy
i learned my skills -
to cook - to fuck
to wash - to fuck
to iron - to fuck
to clean - to fuck
to care - to fuck
to wait - to fuck
& this goat-child cried
& screamed & ran
& the buddha's smile left
& his wisdom faded
& his throne crumbled
& the buddha left &
returned a shepherd.
in that leaving
the goat-child died-
the goat - child died
& a woman was born.

A Moment Left Behind

Have you ever tried to catch a tear?
Catch it on bent fingers.
Press it against your eyelids,
And wish the moment gone.

Or capture bitter words
Ripped from your throat like timber
And surround them -
islands of instants.

I do not claim all possible
Creating myths of modern America.
I cannot swim an ocean.
I attempt the width of a pool.

Move in darkness
know the touch of a woman

a wall of normalcy
wraps your body -
strangles
brightens

wrinkled ugliness

sin

fear

admission

Two days later

you shutter

& take 2 aspirins

love
& friend ship
are words of
people
telling
people

trust is
a word
for
bankers

me

& you

&

You

are

words

for

us.

Autumn Morning
for Shirley

Tree--
that lives
& feeds
& feels
--from the living,
--from the dead,
you grow.

Tree--
in time,
i will move
in dawn stillness,
with you.

With the sun -
fear leaves me
rushes to cover/
leaves lumps
like the backyard gopher
to remind me.

I am afraid
of anyone
of anything
that would harm me/
not the pain
not the act
but,
the desire.



From Deep Within

Nature tests those she would call hers;
Slips us, naked and blank down dark paths.
Skeletons of the sea, this we would become
to suck a ray of sight from the fire.

A woman's body must be taught to speak-
Bearing a lifetime of keys, a patient soul,
moves through a maze of fear and bolts
clothed in soft hues and many candles.

The seasons' tongues must be heard & taken,
And many paths built for the travelers.
A woman's flesh learns slow by fire and pestle,
Like succulent meats, it must be sucked and eaten.

Let me come to you naked
come without my masks
come dark
 and lay beside you

Let me come to you old
come as a dying snail
come weak
 and lay beside you

Let me come to you angry
come shaking with hate
come callused
 and lay beside you

even more

Let me come to you strong
come sure and free
come powerful

and lay with you

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