

the rape journal



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the rape journal

by

dell fitzgerald-Richards

*for donna jaclen joanie
diane mary denise susan
all the other women
and even the men who
helped me through it*

i keep coming back
embarrassingly enough
one does not even speak of it
much less put it in print

but three months ago
yes to this very day
i was raped
in my own bed by a ski-masked
man woolen and red textured
i did not know him

and yesterday
for the first time i laughed
and began discovering myself again
seeing the good things
sunlight and air music and wine

but it has taken a long long time
yet i am strong
and still it has taken
a very long time

even now i cannot erase
the image intruder
marauding again and again
again it recurs
we were wrestling
you friend and i you kissed
me playfully
it was too close
you were he
i froze backed into the wall
how could you know?
wish me luck my love
i have a long way still ahead

will you kiss my hand
and make me well?
kiss my hand my hand
my heart will you love me
perhaps i can love can learn to love
myself again through you

january 18th 1973

sitting here
in my room it's daylight out
i can see that
but he's still out there
waiting again perhaps

i type as quietly as possible
wishing i were invisible

he watched for three days beforehand
and we did not know it
we went about our way to school
and back
to work
everyday things
we did not know we were being watched

january 19th 1973

i'm afraid i don't want to know
you had a nice day
it is too grey out for that
can't you see it?

what are these words
choice freedom and democracy

i had no choice

b movie
viddies flash before me
replayed on walls and doors
just outside
behind me
and it was all so easy
when it happened
just like in the movies i watched myself
in a play laid back watched and waited

february 25th 1973

time once was
when i went to bed with pleasant
dreams thoughts of past loves
bodies warm and close
but now

my hand touches
metal the gun
under the mattress

check my defenses

i still wake startled
seeing
for that long enough
second a vision of a masked man
silhouetted
against my bedroom lighted
door and as i

wrestle with that memory
i listen to
the noises in the street
wondering
if the dog will bark again tonight

march 20th 1973

knowing it's been
two damned months already
and though
i no longer bother with checking
each window
each night
i still check the doors two
and three times
counting till i'll be free again

it is a standing joke
in our house if you want to find scissors
knife or hammer look
under the mattress

(humor eases the pain)

the anger is knowing
how many women share this reality in
silence or joking
all of us too embarrassed

to dwell on it tell anyone
but still haunted all the same night
by night waiting for time
to erase wash it free

march 23rd 1973

when i think of my childhood my mother
driving me to school because we
lived too close
to catch the bus rather than
let me walk
as the other children did
or that i was not allowed
to bicycle much on my own or
even with friends

my father laughing saying
you'll grow up you'll see you'll marry
when i spoke of a career

it was not all bad
but it has been till very recently
a twenty-five year rape of my self-image

and i have not this masculine
drive to conquer or to even explore
or even sometimes move
i just sit here
still and watching
watching waiting
for the key to unlock my being

through this darkness i am groping
but each time i turn
i breathe more freely

april 16th 1974

you say but guns
you are naive and wishing
will get you nowhere
you have not been raped
that is clear and
you are probably not aware of
how many times you came close to it

but i'll say guns
loud and clear
i have been forced into

taking my clothes off for a stranger
a masked stranger at that
a knife at
my throat
my choice yes some choice
open your legs to protect a pretty face
at least my cunt won't show
the damage only my mind
will show that

didn't you know?
i have been ravaged
in the old sense violated
embarrassed and ashamed
i was so naive myself
so very trusting
i hear people saying she could have fought
yes i suppose i could have but
you know what fear is
when your life is at stake
then you will pay
and being raped
seemed very small how many men have
we all slept with anyway
we can say does one more really matter

but there was the knife

then we women
barricaded ourselves behind
the doors we cried and held
each other
and we were brave the next day

perhaps i would not kill next
time if there were a next time
if it were him

i would not kill i would castrate
and leave him to think
on why and by what rights
he thought he could
take me

april 20th 1973

and you too came to me
saying but guns but guns
yes i know violence breeds violence
and i too used to watch tv

see myself as mary tyler moore
while i laughed at the fallen woman raped
or merely leered at because she dared to
assert herself

i've seen hours and hours of it
slanted to look like she deserved it

so i don't watch television
anymore though i didn't smash the set
i sold it like a good little capitalist
and i could take on nbc cbs question
their view of female imagery
but i'm not strong enough yet it would be
just another psychological
gang bang

your solution was education
i can only laugh until
i see the revolution
then talk to me of education

and you told me in your
grand exit to think on it
you thought you had the right
to the last word
being male

you tell me to think on it you pig

when every night for four months
and some days
that's what i've been fighting
especially those nights
alone and that's quite often love
quite often nowadays

golda meir said
why put a curfew on the women
when the men do the raping

no my solution after much
careful thought at least until
the men can humanize themselves is
mandatory castration
for all males age twelve
that should do the trick
that's what you were waiting
to hear wasn't it?

april 24th 1973

happiness is a warm gun
(john lennon said that)

happiness is no need for a gun
(i said that)
but then i used to believe
in fairies too
that's when i was young

but I'm grown up now—
that's what growing up means

not believing
not believing anymore
not believing in anything
except myself and a handful
of other intangibles

may 1st 1973

three guinness bottles sit
waiting for candles to redefine them
these words my 2 a.m. song
my roommate sleeps to silence
while my honky-tonk mind tune
races madly on

the candle casts my shadow to the wall
my doubled giant self a mirror of
my wish to be stronger

trembling i write waiting
fantasies sometimes satisfying
sometimes horrifying
a wish for revenge certainly
playing on my ear

sometimes in the door a figure
i shoot
clean and simple
american

sometimes
if the figure comes closer i hit
kick bite and claw
messy
not so clean
this time my body used for revenge

poetic justice they would say

i grow my nails longer each day
waiting wondering if i shall ever
get a chance to use them and how i shall
if i do

may 2nd 1973

i close my eyes my
veins pulsate blue adrenalized alert
at night i doze awake in day
schizophrenic self
curtain cracked mind split silently
apart to admit an intruder

nothing else can happen now
it has already happened

my skin sliced body fears
like needles drain me putting me
to sleep
for an hour no more

i grow old before
my time

june 8th 1973

relive my fear
get it out of my system

she (the psychologist) said
that if i didn't i would generalize it
to all men
and all fucking

perhaps that would be bad
i'm not so sure

but i wonder thinking
past simple practical considerations about
building a fortress of fear
in which to cower nightly

my parents do that
they do not go on vacation
for fear of vandals
even for the week-end

their fear has made a greater prison

for them which
i do not want for myself

it's a delicate line
a double-edged sword we walk
damned if you do
damned if you don't
it's always been the case

june 10th 1973

i live in this incredible nightmare startled
every time the dog barks
imagining knocks on the window
buying locks for the door

only to think someone could easily
put their fist through the glass
then unhook the lock
where would i be having
heard it woken up
playing cops and robbers
madness and rapist

i wonder if i'm going completely mad until
i talk to the woman next door
forty her husband is a doctor
he works at night
but she wakes up
every time the dog barks
and goes to the back door
to see what's going on
though she's a bit drowsy
four or five times a night
she is defined as sane and i think
i'm going mad?

july 2nd 1973

they caught him
or so they say
(the police that is)
fingerprints match a door
no rapes since

does one man caught solve anything?
and do i believe them?

hearing voices on a tape
police interrogation almost as interesting

as he them wanting illegal lie detector test
he seemed the same
not the voice something of the mind
a vacuum needing to be
filled by rape

he was forty years old
white aryan blond haired
a wife and two kids

"you wouldn't go to bed with me
if i asked"
"no one will"
"too many games i don't like games"
(one man face to face)

maybe the same
maybe not
i'll sure as hell never know

july 4th 1973

the hoffmans next door said
they'd build a fence
between our two fences
then
when the dog barked
they could catch the rapist

i wait gun by my pillow asleep
one half my mind awake for
noises above the electric whirring fan

perhaps if we had a trap door or net

what can we do there is no one else
to protect us
but ourselves

when i am strong
i'll sit by the window
waiting
gun in hand
reallife cops and robbers
(i never played it as a kid
i play it now)

i am not god
but i would kill
tho it frightens me much
to take another person's life

july 11th 1973

ten names published in the paper
news item front page b section
composite drawing
nothing like the pictures
of the suspects i saw

that was april
it happened in january
he was caught in july

he came back to one woman twice
two women moved houses
one woman left town
i wrote poetry
bought a gun
learned to shoot
did karate six days a week
and had a slight nervous breakdown
this is what i know

i wonder what else happened

august 2nd 1973

john wants to install
radar devices around the house

come within three feet at night
you will trip
a switch spotlights to blaze lighting
the block sirens to hear
lighting and sirens and fear
flashing inside outside the house

"you are now under observation
do not move"

only dreamt one dream in this time
large house
many-windowed
men on horseback coming for me
i crouch
by one window machine-gun
in hand

let the fucker stand there
let him sweat
maybe let him go
maybe not maybe

an eye for an eye

i smell the air of violence
breathe the air of pollution
why should i

not reap some benefit also?

august 26th 1973

can i talk to him?
can i talk to his wife?
does she know?
she is a woman too
at least can you show him my poems?

how can we open the eyes of the mind?

a trial guilty
locked away for a while
rehabilitation they say
not in jail buddy
unless he gets raped by another man

we remain strangers
of the night

september 11th 1973

finally this eighth month
later i begin to see my fear

(the past is far enough away i guess)

coming home after six weeks
holiday
walking the streets at night unafraid
i was not in america

never a fear inside
or out
the fear here strikes anew

before i had created a badge
of courage around myself barriers

i could even sleep at night
even alone sometimes
certainly not well slept
but slept thanking small mercies

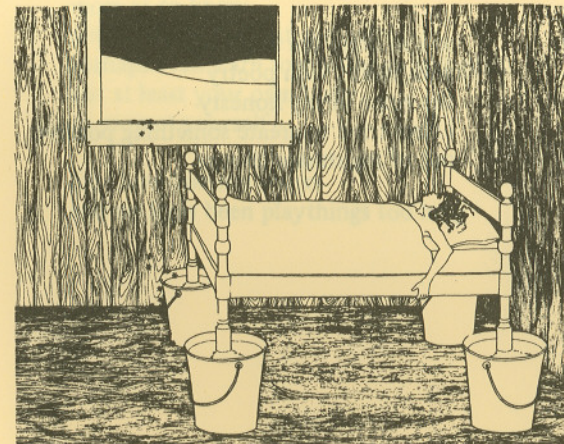
this is my home
(both house and land that i
both hate and love)
women are raped often often
too often

the light bulb blinks in the other room
i finish the song i am playing
all the while looking for an object
any object
a hammer lately used
to hang a picture

i finish the piece cat-like
quiet enter the next room
realizing
there is no one there
only a burnt out light bulb

"all right you bastard come out"

empty rooms echo my words
i exorcise a demon within



a letter to you my sisters

i have learned
i have learned the hard way
and too i have suffered much
even though i have fought
and i have tried to be brave

people will say perhaps
i write for glory
that i am sensational

but i did not bring this man upon myself
he came in the night
with knife and mask
i did not invite him into my home or bed

and i have had to live with it
to deal with it (oh and i do mean
that literally
oh so literally)
deal with it
every day at least once

so i've done the best i can
with words with poetry
the voice of my honesty
i have tried to create something positive
out of nightmare lessons

i hope that it warns you my luckier sisters
that you will be careful
both night and both day
and be alert
because we are at war even though
we are not ready and
we have not chosen this
not yet at any rate

and i hope that it helps you
my other sisters
who have shared my experience
(and i am afraid know how many
of my friends and loved ones too
have been raped
of fought someone off
that this will be the majority of you)
it will help you to feel the past
heal a very deep invisible even wound

that it will fire your anger
make you learn to fight and kick and claw
hate even when necessary
more so to know
and be ready for that necessity
perhaps even learn to use knives and guns
but at least your own body
to protect yourself

for i love you my sisters
and we have been playthings too long