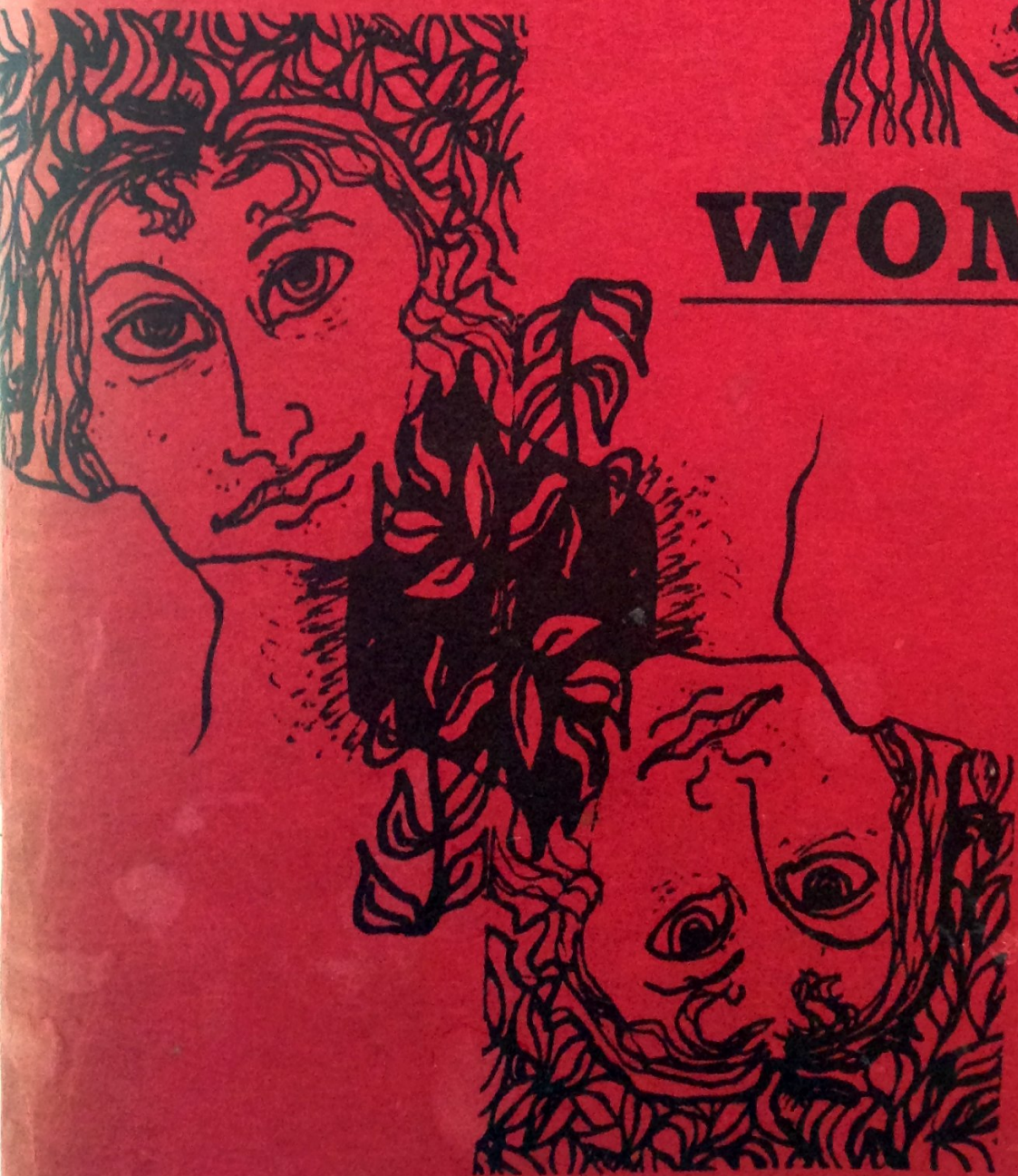


WOMAN

TO

WOMAN



x 27263
25

WOMAN TO WOMAN

a book of poems and drawings by women

from S.C.U.M.

We know that "Great Art" is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can't claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciate the greatness, the proof of their superior sensitivity being that they appreciate the slop that they appreciate.



dear Sisters, beautiful Sisters

Spring is here.

Straight Sisters, Gay Sisters

Spring is here.

Black Sisters, Third World Sisters

Spring is here.

Sisters,

Spring,

is here.

Sisters!



The first mimeographed edition of 1,000 copies of *Woman to Woman* created the impetus for a woman's printing collective and a \$500 grant with which we bought an offset press. This second edition was printed by the offset process by the Women's Press Collective, which presently is working to publish more women's writings and graphics and make them accessible at minimum cost.

Many people have questioned why *Woman to Woman* gives no individual credits to poets and artists for their work, even though we believe very strongly that women deserve recognition as individuals and that women have been "anonymous" too long. We know that "famous" women are used as tokens in the publishing world, and our attempt in *Woman to Woman* is to reject the exploitative standards of that world and at the same time reject the divisions which fame creates among women.

The editing standards for this book were set by some 60 women—with varying politics and tastes—who were asked to pick poems that talked to them. Much of the work is by people who do not think of themselves as poets or artists, who are not self-confident about it. We believe that any poetry or drawing that talks to people is good art, living art, and that a collection of ideas is more interesting and more important than a collection of names. This is the point the book tries to make by its odd structure, which will probably never be repeated. In *Woman to Woman* we wanted to catch a glimpse of ourselves, so after much discussion we decided to let it stand as the small, strange jewel that it is.

This book was compiled for many reasons, the most important being to give women a chance to get their poetry and drawings published—not for the sake of honor or prestige, but for the sake of reaching other women with what they feel. Women who write, draw, paint, dance and just live have something to say and what they express should be available to other women at a minimum of cost and a minimum of hassles to them.

When I think of getting my drawings out to the people through the accepted channels, it's exasperating and in the end when your works do get shown the outcome is incomprehensible and dead, and not available to many people at all. We've all been to the boring art exhibit or tried to read the boring book of poems that somehow changed by the time they left the hands of the creator and were edited, rearranged, excluded, and standardized by the men who had no feelings for them except to add up the money and or prestige they would eventually bring him.

The poems, the drawings in this anthology were all written by women. The idea of the book, the layout, the printing were all done by women, none of whom had any experience at making books. We mimeographed the whole thing, because mimeograph is a simple, easily accessible and beautiful process. Each poem and drawing was put into the book out of the very strong feelings some fifty women had about what it said to them, and the feeling that it will say something to you, too.

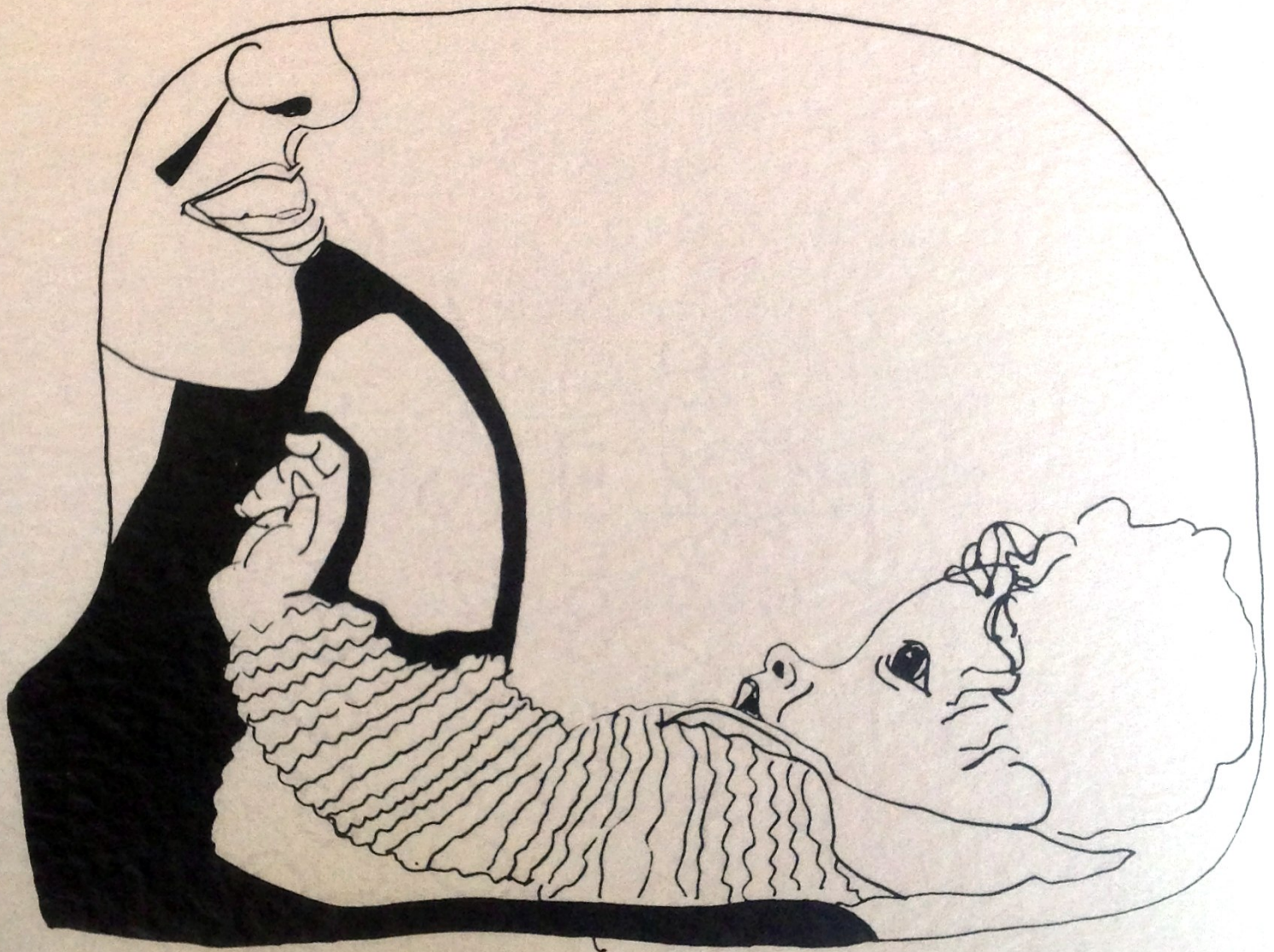
Another purpose of this book is to help bring women together much in the way it has brought the women who worked on this book together in a concrete bond—not as rivals, not as wives, secretaries, mistresses or "girl" Fridays—but as sisters. It is dedicated to all the women who have pieces of themselves tucked away in their bureau drawers, with neither the hours of privacy, encouragement, self-confidence, or extra resources to bring it all together—to make themselves whole. And that's most of the women of the world—including ourselves. We produced a small book by pooling our lives as much as we knew how. One watched the kids while two ran the machine and one fixed supper. With real child care centers and real equality we could all build bridges.

most women are shorter
than most men
it's easy to over

look us
unless we stick our fingers
into your eyes and say
look at me, baby
or you won't be able to see at all.

from S.C.U.M.

Being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female. He attempts to do this by constantly seeking out, fraternizing with and trying to live through and fuse with the female, and by claiming as his own all female characteristics—emotional coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc.—and projecting onto women all male traits—vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc.



FIRST-BORN

I saw no infant
but rather, the frightened never-understood
young girl
the matron who hated old age
and then the old woman
embroidering with memory's heavy thread
I heard no child cry
but storms rage
I saw time erode even the last inscription
on her stone
and so I wept
when they brought her in.

UNKNOWN GIRL IN THE MATERNITY WARD

Child, the current of your breath is six days long.
You lie, a small knuckle on my white bed;
lie, fisted like a snail, so small and strong
at my breast. Your lips are animals; you are fed
with love. At first hunger is not wrong.
The nurses nod their caps; you are shepherded
down starch halls with the other unnested throng
in wheeling baskets. You tip like a cup; your head
moving to my touch. You sense the way we belong.
But this is an institution bed.
You will not know me very long.

The doctors are enamel. They want to know
the facts. They guess about the man who left me,
some pendulum soul, going the way men go
and leave you full of child. But our case history
stays blank. All I did was let you grow.
Now we are here for all the ward to see.
They thought I was strange, although
I never spoke a word. I burst empty
of you, letting you learn how the air is so.
The doctors chart the riddle they ask of me
and I turn my head away. I do not know.

Yours is the only face I recognize.
Bone at my bone, you drink my answers in.
Six times a day I prize
your need, the animals of your lips, your skin
growing warm and plump. I see your eyes
lifting out of their tents. They are blue stones, they begin
to outgrow their moss. You blink in surprise
and I wonder what you see, my funny kin,
as you trouble my silence. I am a shelter of lies.
Should I learn to speak again, or hopeless in
such sanity will I touch some face I recognize?

Down the hall the baskets start back. My arms
fit you like a sleeve, they hold
catkins of your willows, the wild bee farms
of your nerves, each muscle and fold
of your first days. Your old man's face disarms
the nurses. But the doctors return to scold
me. I speak. It is you my silence harms.
I should have known; I should have told
them something to write down. My voice alarms
my throat. "Name of father—none." I hold
you and name you bastard in my arms.

And now that's that. There is nothing more
that I can say or lose.
Others have traded life before
and could not speak. I tighten to refuse
your owling eyes, my fragile visitor.
I touch your cheeks, like flowers. You bruise
against me. We unlearn. I am a shore
rocking you off. You break from me. I choose
your only way, my small inheritor
and hand you off, trembling the selves we lose.
Go child, who is my sin and nothing more.

Old man
who has so long
crabbed at my table
bitched in the bathroom
sulked in my bed, stealing blankets

Old man
who has so long
opened the windows on wet, chilly days
filling my house with noxious city air
used all the towels
admired himself for hours
in the damp bathroom mirror

Old man
whose spoiled and stinking dogs
have so long
befouled the closets and the children's room
eaten our food off the table
bitten our friends

Old man
whom I have met
so long with loving words
as he growls and twists the taste of every season
into one long despair

so long
old man
so long

"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 1: 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 mistaken conundrum
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.



EXILES

Her brown falcon perches on the sink
as steaming water forks over my hands.
Below the wrist they shrivel and turn pink.
I am an exile in my own land.

Her half-grown cats scuffle across the floor,
trailing a slime of blood from where they fed.
I lock the door. They claw under the door.
I am an exile in my own bed.

Her spotted mongrel, bristling with red mange,
sleeps on the threshold of the Third Street bar
where I drink brandy as the couples change.
I am in exile where my neighbors are.

On the pavement, cans of ashes burn.
Her green lizards scuttle through the light.
around torn cardboard charred to glowing fern.
I am in exile in my own sight.

Her blond child sits on the stoop when I
come back at night. Cold hands, blue lids; we both
need sleep. She tells me she is going to die.
I am in exile in my own youth.

Lady of distances, this fire, this water,
this earth make sanctuary where I stand.
Call off your animals and your blond daughter.
I am in exile in my own hands.



D. Figen 1968

surely some woman has been here before me
loved a man she was afraid to fuck
the respect

growing/the changes too fast to measure
reaction time not adequate twirl whirl
the blue white earth selfcontained in
deep dark space white clouds turning
to smog white to browngrey

her love hungry within her/her cunt
fighting for release realease real ease no lover to
free the waiting

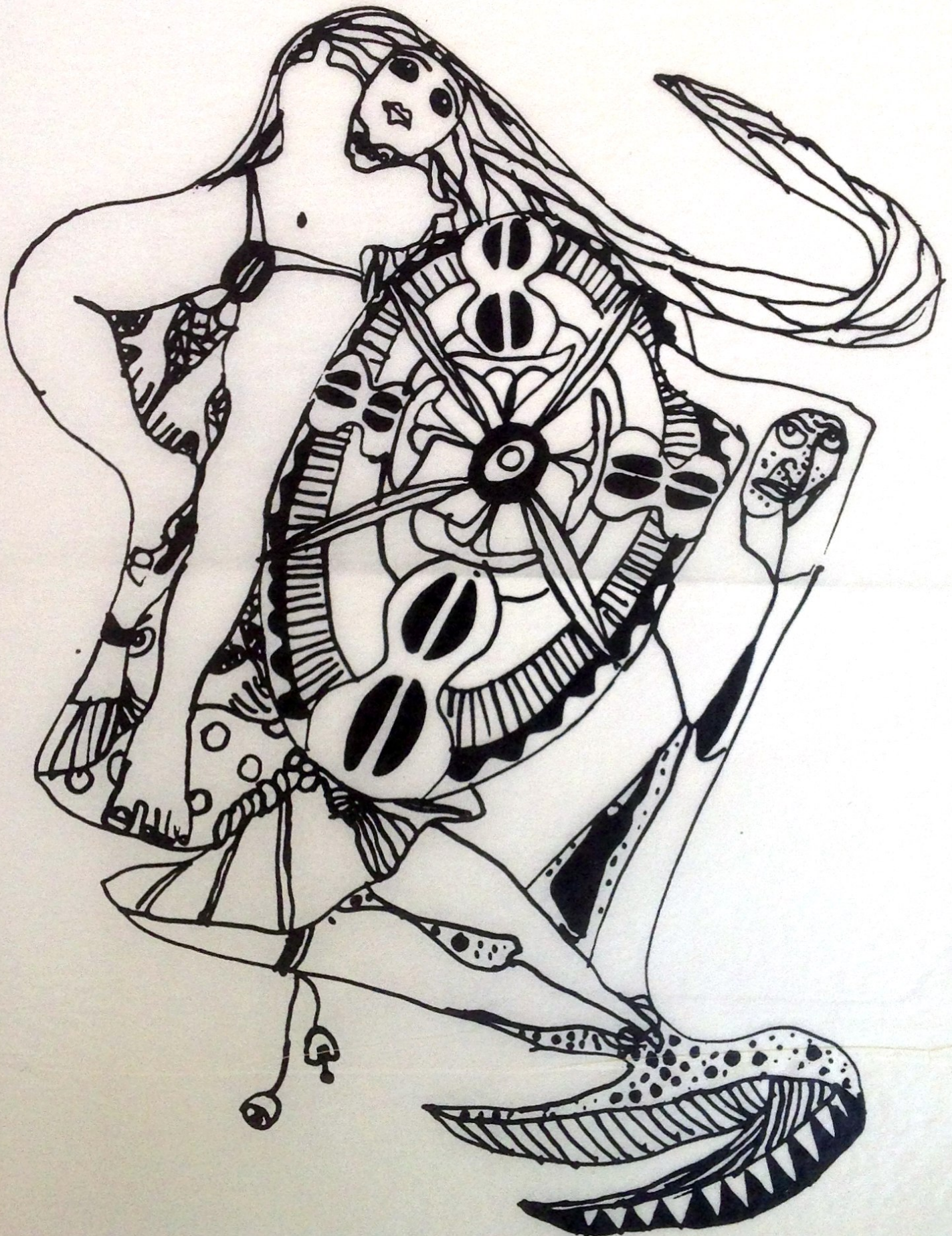
loving but unable
to touch for fear

i search the bookshelves for a woman's name
someone who has been here before me
loved a man she was afraid to fuck
every careless word or gesture driving her
back further further into wherever we go
to sit with our hungry cunts twisting our
lonely bodies, rubbing against the man
we love and want to love and want but too
afraid dont hurt me dont turn me away
i cant try now please love
me want me i am too afraid you are too
afraid where can can we touch and release
how can we touch and release

touch

& release

ease ease easy



THE POET

You gotta love, he said. The world is full of children of sorrow and I am always sad.

He was watching this cat beat up his chick in the street.

Sure man I said. The children of sorrow.

The chick had nothing on but her bra and pants and she was kneeling on the sidewalk.

All over the world he said the children are weeping. I weep with all the children in the world.

Great I said.

The cat kept saying get up you fucking whore but the chick just knelt on the sidewalk.

I weep he said and my tears are part of all the children's tears.

A lot of people stood around watching. They didn't say anything.

You don't understand he said. Then he said you're very hard.

The fuzz was driving down the avenue and they pulled up to dig the scene.

Don't you love he said.

Sure I said. I love all kinds of things.

And the children he said. Don't you love all the lost children.

The cops put the cat into the car. He was still yelling you fucking whore.

Shit man I said. I told you.

The chick was still kneeling there. She picked up her clothes.

No he said that's not what I mean.

She stood there holding her dress. Then she put on her coat and walked away.

That's not enough he said. You gotta love. I love all the lost children.

I know I said. And you weep.

from S.C.U.M.

Most men, utterly cowardly, project their inherent weaknesses onto women, label them female weakness and believe themselves to have female strengths; most philosophers, not quite so cowardly, face the fact that male lacks exist in men, but still can't face the fact that they exist in men only. So they label the male condition the Human Condition, pose their nothingness problem, which horrifies them, as a philosophical dilemma, thereby giving stature to their animalism, grandiloquently label their nothingness their "Identity Problem," and proceed to prattle on pompously about the "Crisis of the Individual," the "Essence of Being," "Existence Preceding Essence," "Existential Modes of Being," etc. etc.

A woman not only takes her identity and individuality for granted, but knows instinctively that the only wrong is to hurt others, and that the meaning of life is love.



NEW YEAR'S INVENTORY

I have no lover

but eight pet cats

and one mad friend

and one who thinks (ha ho)

I am his wife

Snatches of a Day

Grey clouds floated past my window—

& i ignored them,
danced into the streets,
stoned on life.

A woman with brown hair

like dirty corduroy,
riding in a Malibu,
with an olive green suit,
& a big cigar—
stared at me.
I stopped dancing.

An old cripple dragged past me—

I offered to carry her;
She called me a nigger.
I cut her throat,
danced around her head,
sang, "We Shall Overcome,"
hung her scalp over Woolworth's candy counter.

Cops started to arrest me.
Said I couldn't dance without a permit.
So, I skipped slowly.

Science teacher lectured for an hour,
Never did tell me his name,
So, I didn't tell him mine;
Just my student body & social security numbers.

A friend gave me a God's eye –
Shocked me,
Didn't know He had eyes.

My cousin died last week
He was a hero.
Died defending my liberty –
O sweet liberty
Land of the free
& the great.

Went to a dull movie.
Watched a guy masturbate.

I want to go to sleep.
My cat won't let me under the covers.

Revolution

I would not have gotten in this boat with you
I would not
except
where else was there
at the docks end
to go?
the water
was cold.

I would not have let you row the boat.
I could see
what kind of man you were.
I would not
except
who was there to choose
between
you and me?

I would not have let you throw away the oars.
I knew what would happen next.
except
what else was there to do,
struggle
in a boat with a leak
over cold water?



BLUE MONDAY

Blue of the heaps of beads poured into her breasts
and clacking together in her elbows;
blue of the silk
that covers lily-town at night;
blue of her teeth
that bite cold toast
and shatter on the streets;
blue of the dyed flower petals with gold stamens
hanging like tongues
over the fence of her dress
at the opera, opals clasped under her lips
and the moon breaking over her head a
gush of blood-red lizards.

Blue Monday. Monday at 3:00 and
Monday at 5. Monday at 7:30 and
Monday at 10:00. Monday passed under the rippling
California fountain. Monday alone
a shark in the cold blue waters.

You are dead: wound round like a paisley shawl.
I cannot shake you out of the sheets. Your name is
still wedged in every corner of the sofa.
Monday is the first of the week
and I think of you all week.

I beg Monday not to come
so that I will not think of you
all week.

You paint my body blue. On the balcony
in the soft muddy night, you paint me
with bat wings and the crystal
the crystal
the crystal in your arm cuts away
the night, folds back ebony whale skin
and my face, the blue of new rifles,
and my neck, the blue of Egypt,
and my breasts, the blue of sand,
and my arms, bass-blue,
and my stomach, arsenic;

there is electricity dripping from me like cream;

there is love dripping from me I cannot use—like acacia or
jacaranda—fallen blue & gold flowers, crushed into the street.

Love passed me in a blue business suit
and fedora.
His glass cane, hollow and filled with
sharks and whales...
He wore black
patent leather shoes
and had a mustache. His hair was so black it was
almost blue.

"Love," I said.
"I beg your pardon," he said.
"Mr. Love," I said.
"I beg your pardon," he said.

So I saw there was no use bothering him on the street.

Love passed me on the street in a blue
business suit. He was a banker
I could tell.

So blue trains rush by in my sleep.
Blue herons fly overhead.
Blue paint cracks in my
arteries and sends titanium
floating into my bones.
Blue liquid pours down
my poisoned throat and blue veins
rip open my breast. Blue daggers tip
and are juggled on my palms.
Blue death lives in my fingernails.

If I could sing one last song
with water bubbling through my lips
I would sing with my throat torn open,
the blue jugular vein spouting that black shadow pulse
and on my lips
I would balance volcanic rock
emptied out of my veins. At last
my children strained out
of my body. At last my blood
solidified and tumbling into the ocean.
It is blue.
It is blue.
It is blue.

farewell

in the way that the indians ground acorns
in the way that the indians ground corn
using the round stone
working the round stone into the hollow
of the granite rock with mica shining
so that the meal was made
so that the mica shone from the rock
near the knees under the blankets
so that the smoke of the fire rose
while the near oak trees dropped leaves
down down into autumn

in the way that the braided women ground
using the round stone season after season
coming year after year to the same stones
worn round and deep with the visit
coming to the stones above the river
near the fires near the water

In the way that the women mixed
in the way the bread was made
in the way the bread was placed in ovens
in the way the bread was eaten
in the way the bread became flesh
in the way the flesh leaned to the stones
and became earth and acorns





ON HEARING OF A YOUNG TEXAN'S
PITY FOR WOMEN WHO TALK TOO MUCH
WHO ARE NOT LOVED

All women over thirty talk too much.
Their energy has gone wild in their veins.
They might have been loved,
They might be loved still,
In some brutal, indifferent, beseeching
Diffident, or confident and gentle way.
But it is not their love.
Their toe does not set the measure.
They cling to it though.
Oh how they cling to it.
Because without this love they
Are nothing at all.

And so they,
Accomodate, accomodate, accomodate,
Or pull their households
Into such tight patterns
That it strangles them all.
But by thirty they have learned,
And they talk too much to themselves,
Or the cat, or to the Lord,
Or they spew it any place at all.
All of them.

Metamorphosis Into Bureaucrat

My hips are a desk.
From my ears hang
chains of paperclips.
Rubber bands form my hair.
My breasts are wells of mimeograph ink.
My feet bear casters.
Buzz. Click.
My head
is a badly organized file.
My head is a switchboard
where crossed lines crackle.
My head is a wastebasket
of worn ideas.
Press my fingers
and in my eyes appear
credit and debit
zing. Tinkle.
My navel is a reject button.
From my mouth issue cancelled reams.
Swollen, heavy, rectangular
I am about to be delivered
of a baby
xerox machine.
File me under W
because I wonce
was
a woman.



To A Sister

What nerve cramp keeps you shut
inside the house
where you cannot meet, awake,
the secrets
which you dream at night?

Not yet twenty years old
and loose upon the world, your husband
tries to master the shiftless days and nights
on a motor bike, like
a bat upon a flying star, playing
with paper stars.
You keep home-vigil, alone,
with needle and thread
to sew up the holes in the silence.

Yet, your wedding
was a giant pocket fashioned to hold the moon.

Time locks a woman's brood
of wish into the drawers of some
other day.

Morning High

Love is where its at.

Because if you don't know where its at,
Baby, I can't help you out.

But if you look up
Or look anywhere
You'll know that its love baby
oh yeah!

In the morning yawn
We did it on the lawn
The dew wet all over us.

The earth didn't move
But things started flying,
Like birds and morning papers
And winged insects transparent in the sun
Except for the dark center
Which lay between you and me baby, your
Contempt for women which made me
Want to stick it up your ass.

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,

BELLVIEW STATE MENTAL HOSPITALS
IS THE MAWFUCKING UOONITED STATES

uh uh uh

Have you ever felt insanity
creepin, all over your flesh
nippin and tuckin leavin trails
of goose bumps?

Have you ever felt insanity
pulsatin inside your veins
beatin out the same rythm
as that of the blob?

is you ever felt crazy?

You (uh) you (uh) ever wig out
spacin like a mad dog screamin
for help and strength

Like,/Like,/Like, when you dream
you fallin and that feeling of
terror as you hurtle

downward and the realease
when you hit Oooooohhhh

Awwwooo Booom

Sanity?



Stockton State Mental Hospital 1962

Shirley standing on the table
to see me thru the bars.
I can't hear thru double glass,
only see her mouth say
"They're sending me to juvenal hall,
Martinez."
her feet in white buck shoes and
cotton socks.
she was so young
her breasts hurt when i touched them

elin



from TENDER BUTTONS

A hurt mended stick, a hurt mended cup, a hurt mended article of exceptional relaxation and annoyance, a hurt mended, hurt and mended is so necessary that no mistake is intended.

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 & ¼ days
no time given
to holidays.
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 & ¼ days
of spray
spray
spray
& i bought it.





MISS AMERICA CLAP CONTEST 1969

I remember the tit parade happening before I had any. Fat little girl with pimples dreaming about thighs like she was Bert Parks perk over, long blond hair and yes, TALENT, like baton twirling or singing "Maria" while doing the splits.

So tonight the pageant with graying Bert clumsy with his flirting, sweat beading as he grabs those luscious buttered DUMB lovelies and walks them over the heads and between the legs of Beauty Judges.

Now we are down to the five finalists—
Miss New Jersey who wanted to "teach Brain damaged children"
And Miss Ohio who had a brain damaged sister
and the big chick from Minnesota who said we'd never have a female president because men are more logical
and on and on, me saying "what a bunch of shit"
and them, wearing gloves, all clapping for each other.



Black Leather, Because Bumble Bees Look Like It

When the bumble bees ride their black motor cycles down to the country to watch death swimming in the river, nude, enjoying the summer, and me, gathering mushrooms in the shade nearby, everything is quiet and peaceful.
Death and I get along because we are not too personal. And my life is like Chinese to him; he doesn't read it or understand. But, his black clothes and leather cap thrown on the bank carelessly remind me of my children, like hundreds of bee carcasses, tossed together and dead from a storm that wrecked the hive.
Watch him, death, climb out of the river, without his clothes. Isn't he beautiful? A man build to swim and ride. Shall we swim together, Mr. Big, Beautiful, and Black Death?
push over the rocks, gather watercress and smile at the fish?
Isn't it nice in the country, Mr. Death?
If I put a frame around your clothes, lying on the bank, so, that just in the corner of the picture, we might see one of your bare feet climbing out of the water— death's foot, and the bees nearby, and me lying nude on the bank while the bees ride by—
what would you think of that, Mr. Death?
Would you still think my name Chinese?
And would we still get along?
Oh Mr. Death, I've seen you so many times.
How is it we meet so often, yet never speak?

from S.C.U.M.

The female's individuality, which the male is acutely aware of, but which he doesn't comprehend and isn't capable of relating to or grasping emotionally, frightens and upsets him and fills him with envy. So he denies it in her and proceeds to define everyone in terms of his or her function or use, assigning to himself, of course, the most important functions—doctor, president, scientist—thereby providing himself with an identity, if not individuality, and tries to convince himself and women (he's succeeded best at convincing women) that the female function is to bear and raise children and to relax, comfort and boost the ego of the male; that her function is such as to make her interchangeable with every other female. In actual fact, the female function is to relate, groove, love and be herself, irreplaceable by anyone else; the male function is to produce sperm. We now have sperm banks.

BITTER HERBS

NATURAL PUSSY

25¢ in a dispenser

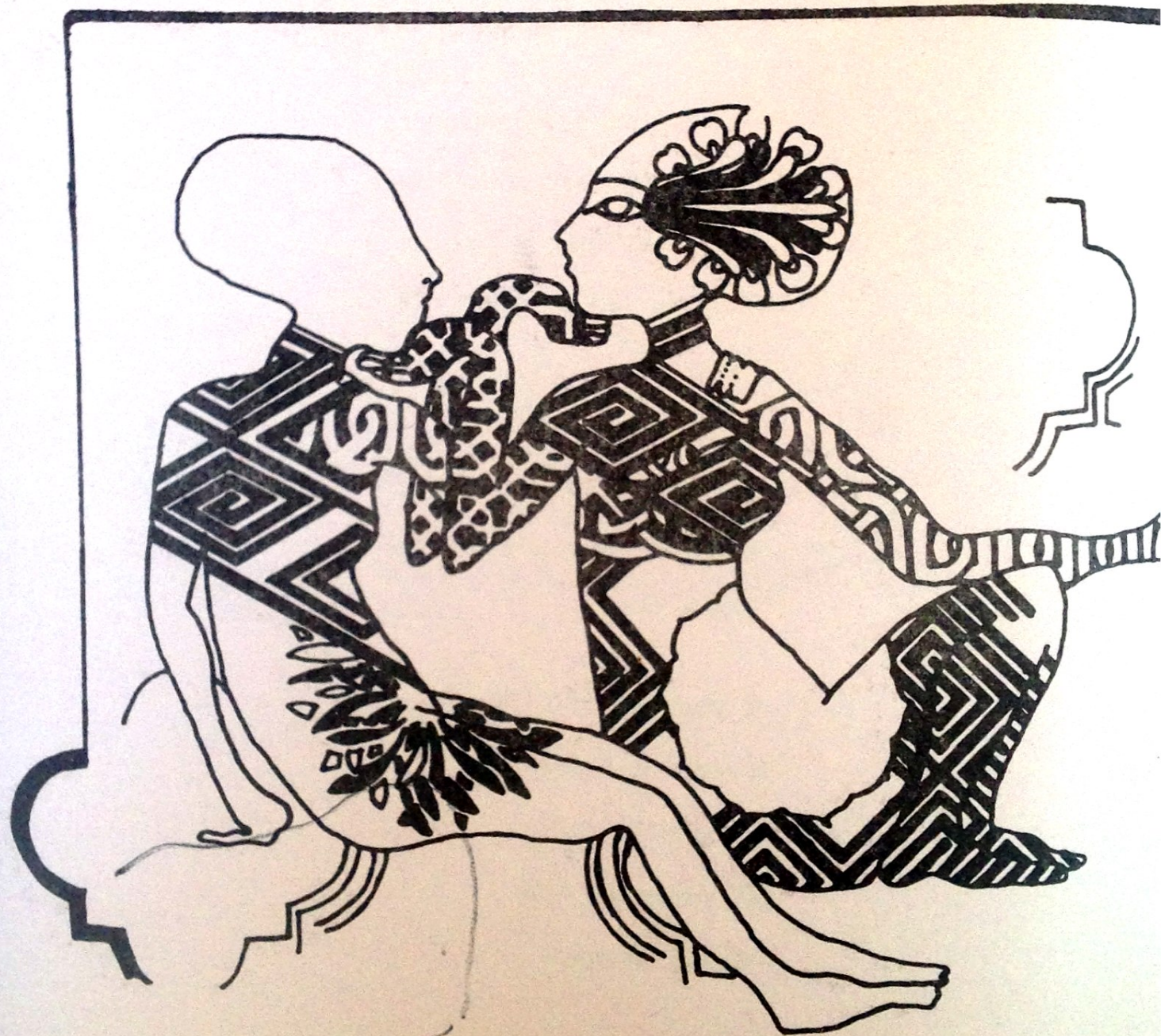
Gulf station, pinole

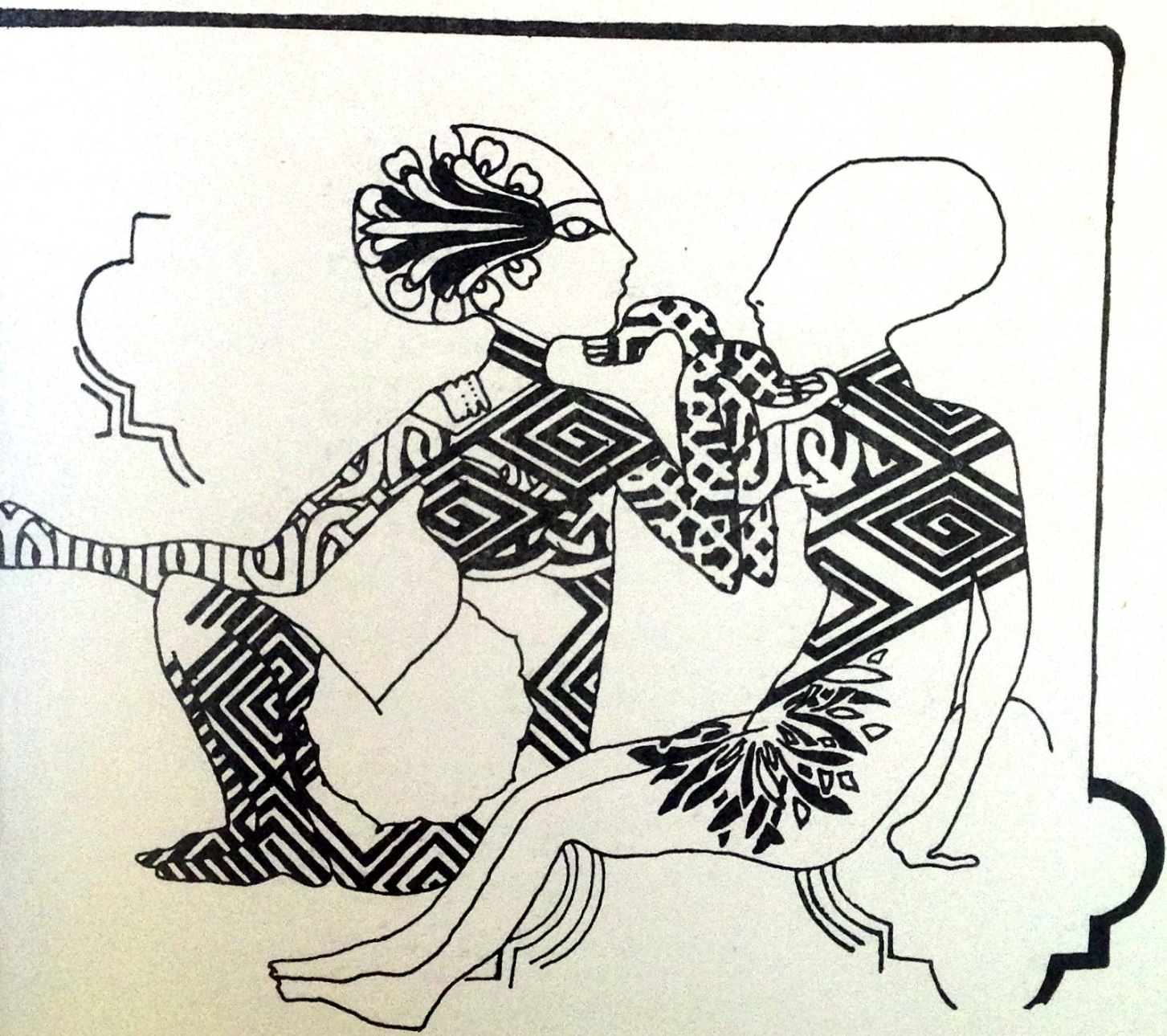
J Douglas says prisoners
use cardboard rolls, filled
with a greasy baggy,
surrounded by a hot wet
washcloth

"sure feels like pussy"

Playboy bunnies twitch their tails
bouncing squashedup titties
and grinning

If you come in me
a child is likely to
come back out.
my name is Alta.
I am a woman.





from S.C.U.M.

Men have contempt for themselves, for all other men and for all women who respect and pander to them; the insecure, approval-seeking, pandering. male females have contempt for themselves and for all women like them; the self-confidant, swinging, thrill-seeking female females have contempt for men and for the pandering male females. In short, contempt is the order of the day.

Love is not dependency or sex, but friendship, and therefore, love can't exist between two males, between a male and a female or between two females, one or both of whom is a mindless, insecure, pandering male; like conversation, love can exist only between two secure, free-wheeling, independent, groovy females, since friendship is based on respect, not contempt.

I feel irreconcilably irresponsible.

I don't feel the sentiment that goes with desire to make a
commitment of a real nature.

I have always pledged myself to gain food for those without.

I have always wanted to end all wars.

Once I wished I had all the money in the world so I could
implement the above.

Crying is an event to absorb from someone else.

Or do with someone nearby.

I feel coldness in my spine—now stiffness.

I am starving for physical comfort.

I cannot go to a woman who has not expressed an openness to
loving me.

I can go to a woman for love—to give love to.

My poem is small like a homefire.

It is enough to let me know I am live, well and loving.

I love many things you do— I detest your smoking.

You care— Old Fashioned Quaker Caring.

No man deserves your love and attention.

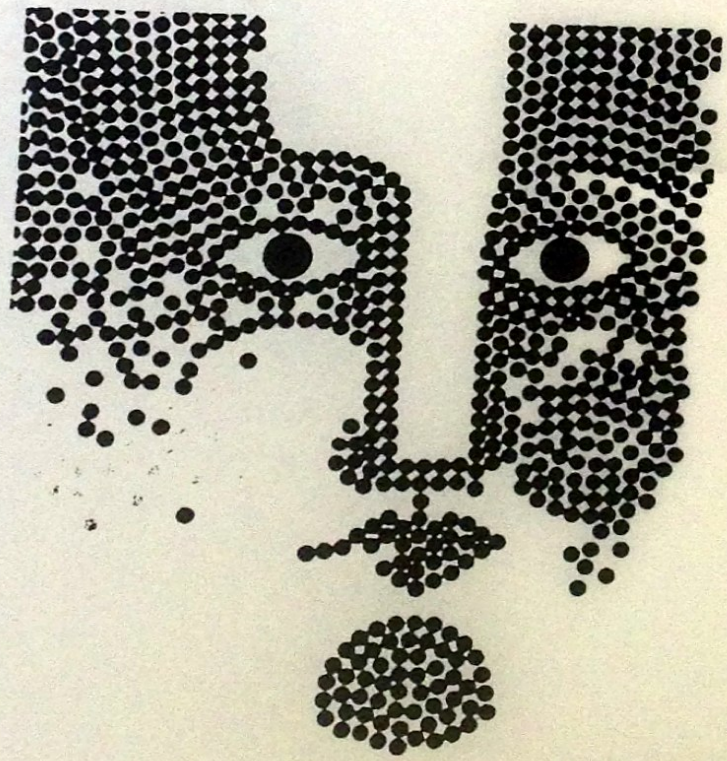
For womankind I am jealous of your man-spent moments.

I simply, fearfully, cautiously, bewilderingly love you.

Besides the "attraction of opposites"

How do we beings get together to love?

Theres one thing a man cant have: the
love between two women.
It must be hard-as-males
to miss that softness growing strong
He thinks theres too much
female male imitation?
There is: but know
the old ideas are numbered.
We will consummate differently,
when theres a need—place
our chromosomes into each others
ovum.



You dont think im missing?
my father said: Where are your high heels?
Shave your legs!

you dont think im missing?
my son said: Mother, who are the hells angels?
Take off that jacket, you look terrible.

Asking for Ruthie

you know her hustle
you know her white legs
flicker among headlights
and her eyes pick up the wind
while the fast hassle of living
ticks off her days
you know her ways

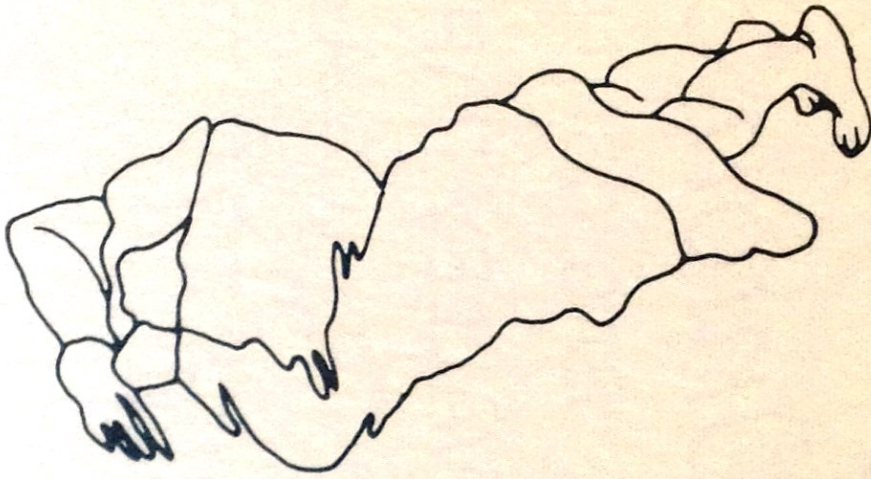
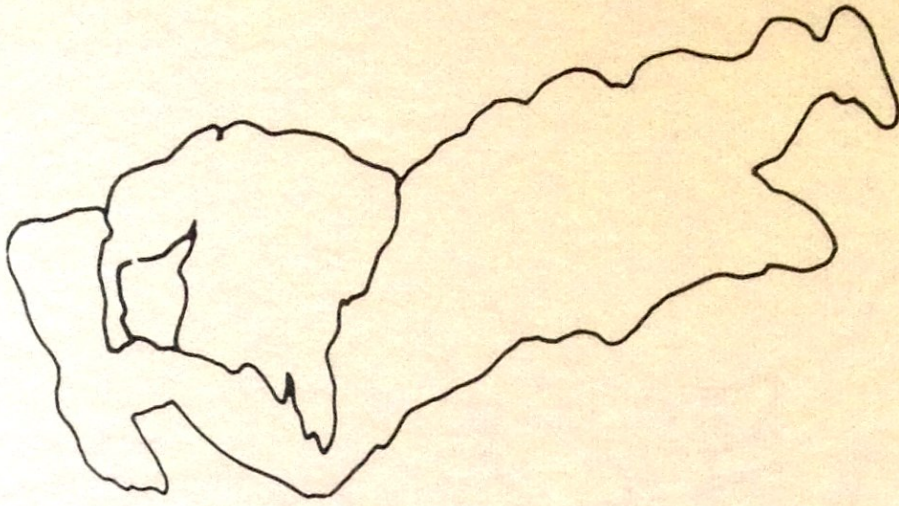
you know her hustle
you know her lonely pockets
lined with tricks
turned and forgotten
the men like mice hide
under her mind
lumpy, bigeyed
you know her pride

you know her blonde arms cut
by broken nickels in
hotelrooms and by razors of
summer lightning on the road
but you know the wizard
highway, no resisting so
she moves, she is forever missing

get her a stopping place
before the night slides dirty
fingers under her eyelids and
the weight of much bad kissing
breaks that ricepaper face

sun cover her, earth
make love to Ruthie
stake her to hot lunches in the wheat fields
make bunches of purple ravens
fly out in formation, over her eyes
and let her newest lovers
be gentle as women
and longer lasting





poem at thirty

it is midnight
no magic bewitching
hour for me
i know only that
i am here waiting
remembering that
once as a child
i walked two
miles in my sleep.
did i know
then where i
was going?
traveling. i'm
always traveling.
i want to tell
you about me
about nights on a
brown couch when
i wrapped my
bones in lint and
refused to move.
no one touches
me anymore.
father do not
send me out
among strangers.
you you black man
stretching scraping
the mold from your body.
here is my hand.
i am not afraid
of the night.

THE DEATH-DANCE

In the bedroom dense with feathers and smell of sex
we turn. One of us starts it,
an accusation in letters of black flame.
A monumental bill covers the ceiling,
shock scorches the air,
everything hums and has edges of blue light.
We both hope it will stop and leap at each other.
Sharks, we thrash in the darkening sea,
your teeth are in my throat,
I am ripping your flank.
Down we plunge churning and tearing
while the banner of our blood
flares on the whirlpool.
The pain is an avalanche,
the pain roars and blackens everything.
Entrails float around us.
We must both be dead.
Then we are paddling with broad porpoise grins
breaking the surface to leap,
sleek and totally erogenous and rough.
A dangerous way to get clean:
the smell of blood attracts hungry fish.
But how else to cut through the barnacles and the slime,
the scabs and toughening hide of each day?
How, unless we are willing to fight to the bone,
can we ever find each other naked?



february 18, 1968
to mother who loves to lecture on culture

come at me with truth, mom
all 160 pounds.
how its a shame
about the darkies.
point your fucking
index finger,
lecture me on
civilization.
if you ever
figure out that
i'm a person
i'm a person,
you white bitch,
let me know.

february 21, 1968
to a black student at merritt who refused my
quarter for the program in memory of Malcolm X

i held out the quarter.
"no whites" and you
closed my hand.
"can i get in later?"
"uh, okay, stand behind
me. we're letting
blacks in first,
you understand."
oh yeah. i understand.
i've heard that line
somewhere before.
Malcolm X would have
recognized but you
don't know either that
i'm a person.
someday i'll introduce
you to my mother.
you can blow each other

up



A work of artifice

The bonzai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
till split by lightning.
But a gardener
carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.
Every day as he
whittles back the branches,
the gardener croons,
It is your nature
to be small and cosy,
domestic and weak,
how lucky, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in.
With living creatures
we must begin very early
to dwarf their growth:
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you
love to touch

THIS IS RIDICULOUS

I NEVER SAID YES FOR NO

(or no for yes)

I WAS (am) WHERE I

WANT TO BE.

ALWAYS ME....FREE.

I LIKES ME

ALWAYS HAS (will)

I HAS BEEN TOLD.

"not to, too much
like yourself too much

YOU EGOMANIAC YOU"

I SAYS,

"ARE I PARANOID OR AM YOU ATTACKING ME."

The term paranoia is sloughed off on me for my real fears
and protective inhibitions.

have you ever ridden on a merry-go-round?
when the garish colors started
swirling & the loud music
began to get harsher,
and you wanted to jump off,
but you were

too frightened?
until the people on the ground
were nothing more
than a distant blur,
and you couldn't jump off
because it had picked
up speed & was going
too fast?

then the frenzied whirl swept
towards you in sickening waves
of dizziness and a fear worse
than that of falling off
gripped you & penetrated into
the china-shelf where your
nerve-endings & muscle-fibers
were attached, prying your
clinging fingers from the rail . . .

and you jumped.

now you crouch among the
broken branches, dazed &
shaking with weariness

and watch the others
on the merry-go-round
as they twirl
faster & faster
gasping
into something
as harsh & faded
as darkness

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.





Vietnamese woman speaking
to an American soldier

Stack your body

on my body

make

life

make children play

in my jungle hair

make rice flare into my sky like

whitest flak

the whitest flash

my eyes have

burned out

looking

press your swelling weapon

here

between us if you

push it quickly I should

come

to understand your purpose

what you bring us

what you call it

there

in your country

A CHANT FOR MY SISTERS

it's all right to be woman
dishwasher, big belly, sore back
swollen ankles/

it's all right to be woman
the listener, the waiter/sailor's wife
patient
by the seashore/looking out

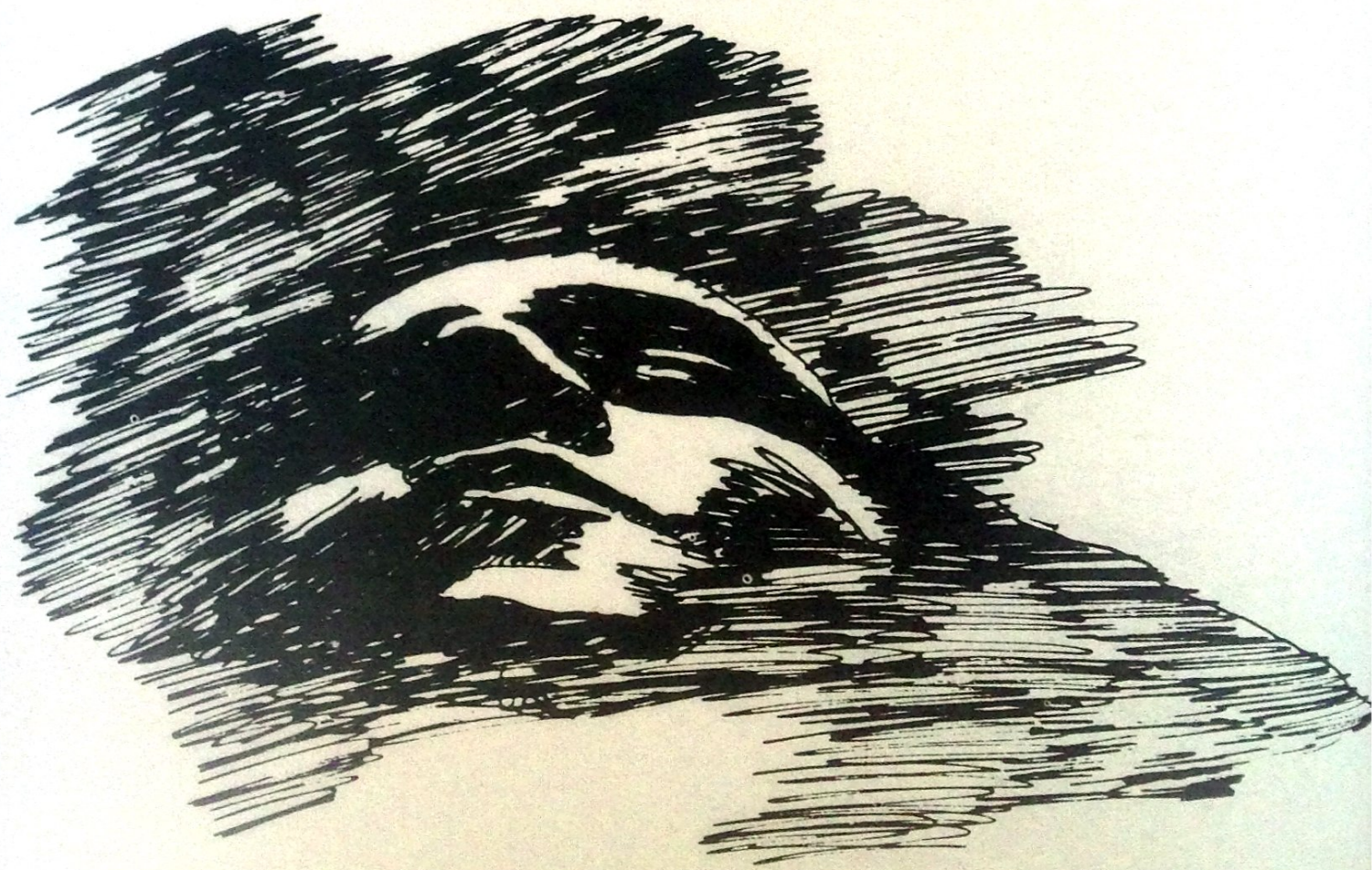
it's all right to be woman
a chant for my sisters
strong before me
harriet sojourner emma and rosa
harriet sojourner emma and rosa

a chant for my sisters
rifke sorel rochel & mary
yema ya yemaya yemaya yemaya

yemaya yemaya yemaya yemaya
oshun
oshun

a chant to my sisters
strong in battle
la bandita killing generals with zapata
maria in mexico and mississippi
haydee with the rest at moncada
a chant for my sisters
dead before I could meet them
victorious in havana
and dien bien phu





THE COMMON WOMAN

1. Helen, at 9 am, at noon, at 5: 15

Her ambition is to be more shiny and metallic, black and purple as a thief at midday; trying to make it in a male form, she's become as stiff as possible.

Wearing trim suits and spike heels, she says "bust" instead of breast; somewhere underneath she misses love and trust, but she feels that spite and malice are the prices of success. She doesn't realize yet, that she's missed success, also, so her smile is sometimes still genuine. After a while she'll be a real killer, bitter and more wily, better at pitting the men against each other and getting the other women fired. She constantly conspires.

Her grief expresses itself in fits of fury over details, details take the place of meaning, money takes the place of life.

She believes that people are lice who eat her, so she bites first; her thirst increases year by year and by the time the sheen has disappeared from her black hair, and tension makes her features unmistakably ugly, she'll go mad. No one in particular will care. As anyone who's had her for a boss will know.

The common woman is as common as the common crow.

II. Ella, in a square apron, along Highway 80

She's a copperheaded waitress,
tired and sharp-worded, she hides
her bad brown tooth behind a wicked
smile, and flicks her ass
out of habit, to fend off the pass
that passes for affection.

She keeps her mind the way men
keep a knife—keen to strip the game
down to her size. She has a thin spine,
swallows her eggs cold, and tells lies.
She slaps a wet rag at the truck drivers
if they should complain. She understands
the necessity for pain, turns away
the smaller tips, out of pride, and
keeps a flask under the counter. Once,
she shot a lover who misused her child.
Before she got out of jail, the courts had pounced
and given the child away. Like some isolated lake,
her flat blue eyes take care of their own stark
bottoms. Her hands are nervous, curled, ready
to scrape.

The common woman is as common
as a rattlesnake.

III. Nadine, resting on her neighbor's stoop

She holds things together, collects bail,
makes the landlord patch the largest holes.
At the Sunday social she would spike
every drink, and offer you half of what she knows,
which is plenty. She pokes at the ruins of the city
like an armored tank; but she thinks
of herself as a rip saw cutting through
knots in wood. Her sentences come out
like thick pine shanks
and her big hands fill the air like smoke.
She's a mud-chinked cabin in the slums,
sitting on the doorstep counting
rats and raising 15 children,
half of them her own. The neighborhood
would burn itself out without her;
one of these days she'll strike the spark herself.
She's made of grease
and metal, with a hard head
that makes the men around her seem frail.
The common woman is as common as
a nail.



IV. Carol, in the park, chewing on straws

She has taken a woman lover
whatever shall we do
she has taken a woman lover
how lucky it wasnt you

And all the day through she smiles and lies
and grits her teeth and pretends to be shy,
or weak, or busy. Then she goes home
and pounds her own nails, makes her own
bets, and fixes her own car, with her friend.

She goes as far
as women can go without protection
from men.

On weekends, she dreams of becoming a tree;
a tree that dreams it is ground up
and sent to the paper factory, where it
lies helpless in sheets, until it dreams
of becoming a paper airplane, and rises
on its own current; where it turns into a
bird, a great coasting bird that dreams of becoming
more free, even, than that—a feather, finally, or
a piece of air with lightning in it.

she has taken a woman lover
whatever can we say

She walks around all day
quietly, but underneath it
she's electric;
angry energy inside a passive form.
The common woman is as common
as a thunderstorm.

V. Detroit Annie, hitchhiking

Her words pour out as if her throat were a broken artery and her mind were cut-glass, carelessly handled. You imagine her in a huge velvet hat with great dangling black feathers, but she shaves her head instead and goes for three-day midnight walks. Sometimes she goes down to the dock and dances off the end of it, simply to prove her belief that people who cannot walk on water are phonies, or dead.

When she is cruel, she is very, very cool and when she is kind she is lavish. Fishermen think perhaps she's a fish, but they're all fools. She figured out that the only way to keep from being frozen was to stay in motion, and long ago converted most of her flesh into liquid. Now when she smells danger, she spills herself all over, like gasoline, and lights it. She leaves the taste of salt and iron under your tongue, but you don't mind. The common woman is as common as the reddest wine.

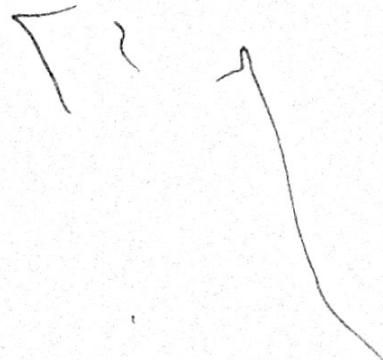
VI. Margaret, seen through a picture window

After she finished her first abortion
she stood for hours and watched it spinning in the
toilet, like a pale stool.

Some distortion of the rubber
doctors with their simple tubes and
complicated prices,
still makes her feel guilty.
White and yeasty.

All her broken bubbles push her down
into a shifting tide, where her own face
floats above her like the whole globe.
She lets her life go off and on
in a slow strobe.

At her last job she was fired for making
strikes, and talking out of turn;
now she stays home, a little blue around the edges.
Counting calories and staring at the empty
magazine pages, she hates her shape
and calls herself overweight.
Her husband calls her a big baboon.
Lusting for changes, she laughs through her
teeth, and wanders from room to room.
The common woman is as solemn as a monkey
or a new moon.



VII. Vera, from my childhood

Solemnly swearing, to swear as an oath to you
who have somehow gotten to be a pale old woman;
swearing, as if an oath could be wrapped around your shoulders
like a new coat:

For your 28 dollars a week and the bastard boss
you never let yourself hate;

and the work, all the work you did at home
where you never got paid;

For your mouth that got thinner and thinner
until it disappeared as if you had choked on it,
watching the hard liquor break your fine husband down
into a dead joke.

For the strange mole, like a third eye
right in the middle of your forehead;
for your religion which insisted that people
are beautiful golden birds and must be preserved;
for your persistent nerve
and plain white talk—

the common woman is as common
as good bread
as common as when you couldnt go on
but did.

For all the world we didnt know we held in common
all along
the common woman is as common as the best of bread
and will rise

and will become strong—I swear it to you
I swear it to you on my own head

I swear it to you on my common
woman's
head



Lords

printing error, this poem
reversed. Please read following
page first.

the people do not struggle for fun
es para vivir

La gente quiere

bailar

comer

amar

amar

amar

the people want to party

to lay up

to dance

to eat

the people want to party

we need food

space - sleep - health

everything good

the revolution is everything good

es para vivir vivir vivir

the revolution is to party.

felip say "you can't die but one time"

and we reply "or live either"

(written at Iglesia de la Gente occupied by Young Lords
jan 3 1970)

NOTE: Due to a printing error, this poem
is reversed. Please read following
page first.

IGLESIA DE LA GENTE

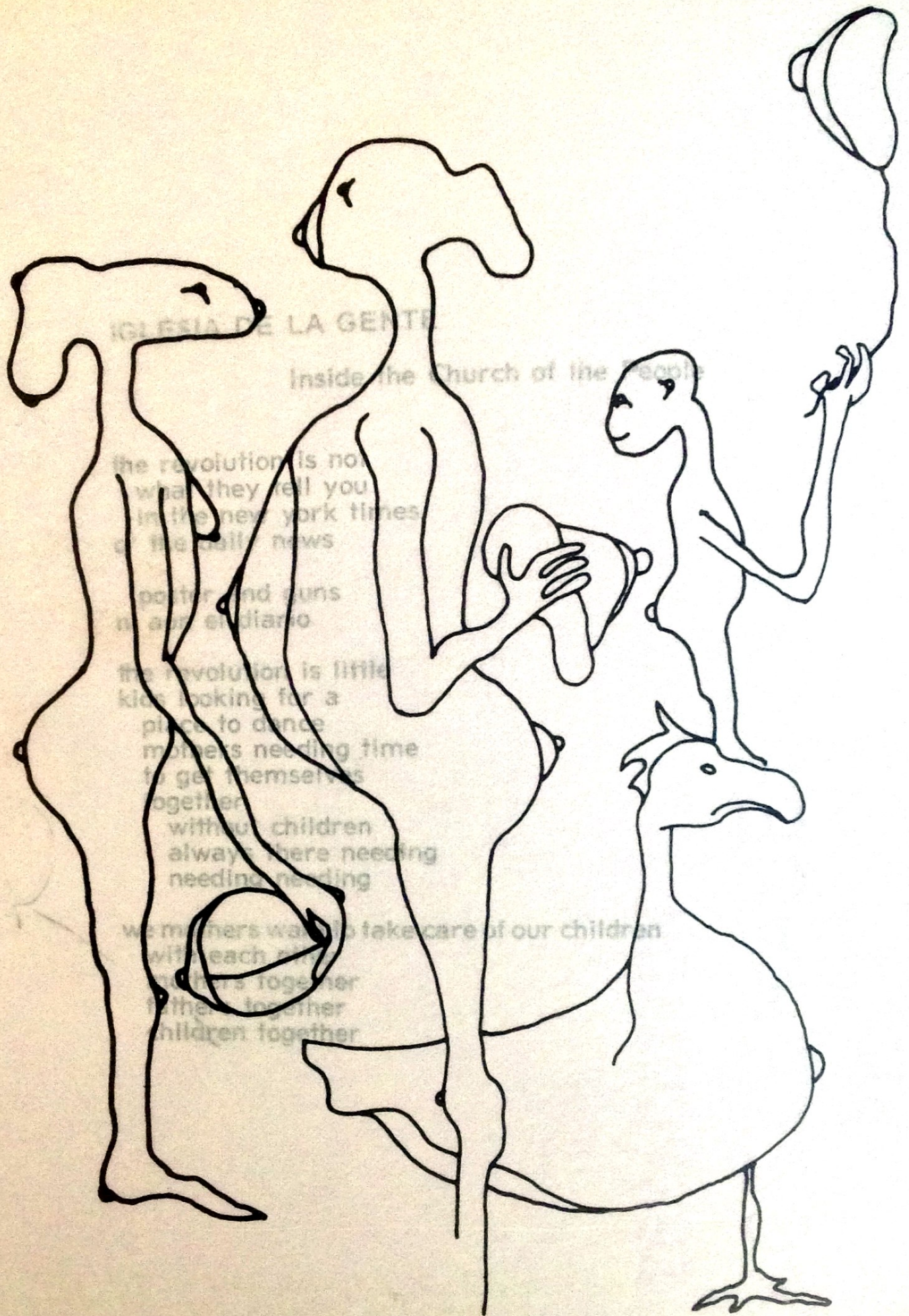
Inside the Church of the People

the revolution is not
what they tell you
in the new york times
or the daily news

poster and guns
ni aun el diario

the revolution is little
kids looking for a
place to dance
mothers needing time
to get themselves
together
without children
always there needing
needing needing

we mothers want to take care of our children
with each other
mothers together
fathers together
children together



IGLESIA DE LA GENTE

Inside the Church of the People

the revolution is not
what they tell you
in the new york times
or the daily news

poetry and runs
in an editorial

the revolution is little
kids looking for a
place to dance
mothers needing time
to get themselves
together
without children
always there needing
needing needing

we mothers want to take care of our children
with each other
mothers together
fathers together
children together

The Babysitters

A message to mothers from your sweet, demure servants:
No more dollars: We want it all.

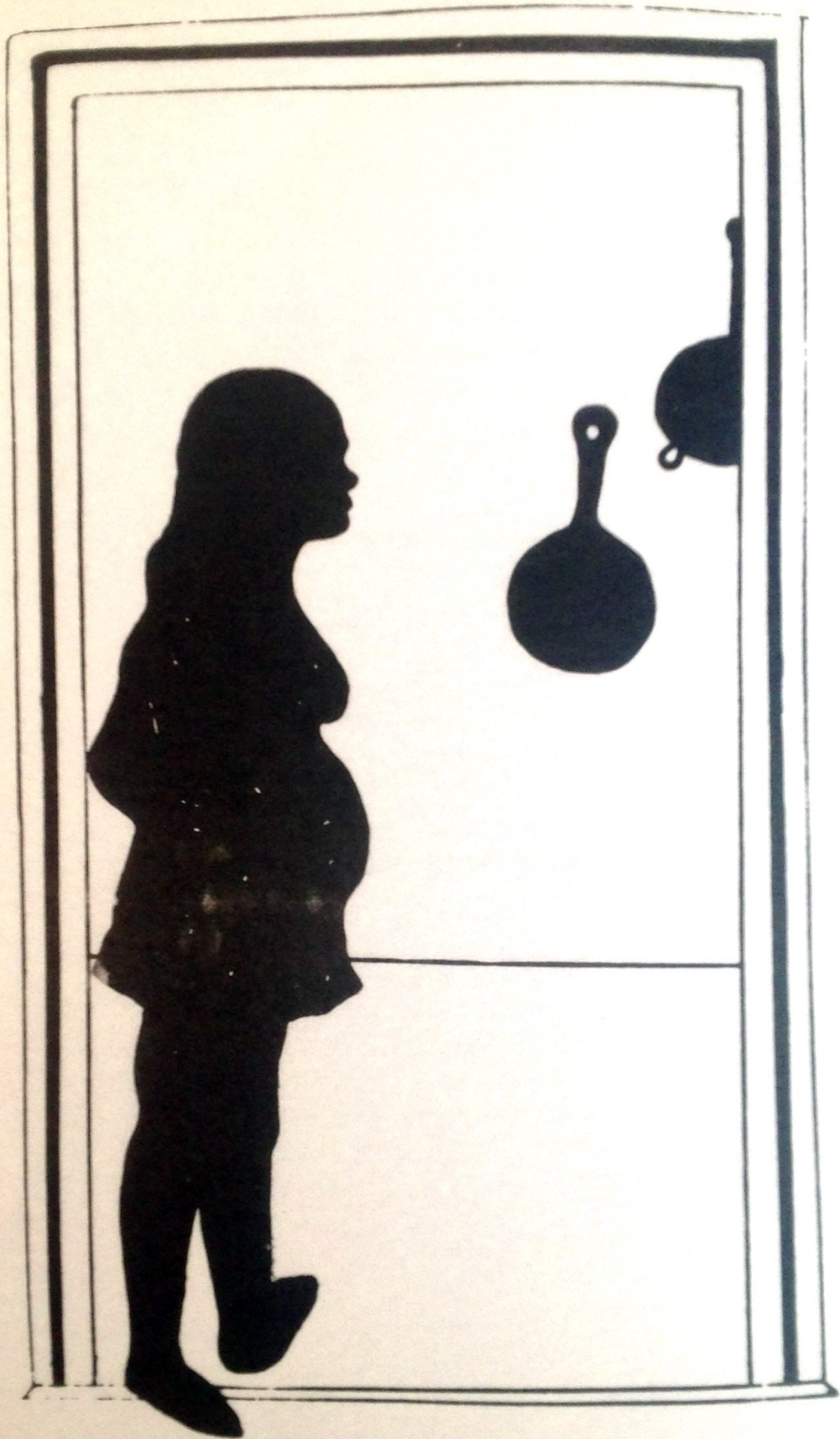
If you have a care, give us your children,
and you be the sitters.

Gladly, you say. We'll have to wait for that reality.

With a kiss on your sons head, let go your stranglehold?
Let go? let it go. LET IT GO!

We sweet demure sitters dont want the shitwork:
We want
the growth

Sitters need being mothers. Rock all with us
and share the fine pride.



WE RISE UP
WE RISE UP ANGRY
WE RISE UP TOGETHER

when I was 5 my parents said "be a good little girl
and you will get what's coming to you"
candy, petticoats and 5 little dolls were coming to me.
all dressed in pink with curlers.
so i learned early.
my parents told me not to jump around crazy like little boys
and not to be loud-mouthed like my brother
so i learned how to behave, walk nicely, talk softly,
and to say "thank you" whenever somebody asked how I was.
I never screamed "lousy, rotten—fuck you!"
I never did that.
but more things were coming to me.

when I was a teenager, my parents said "look—let's get that straight:
you are pretty—and not too bright, that's all right.
now go to school while you can."
school was awful—so I started looking around for a good man.
but there were problems.

I had pimples. people said that was normal.
but some of my girlfriends didn't have them. so pimples didn't seem
normal to me at all.
I bought this stuff from Max Factor that I knew from TV.
the commercials said that pimples were damaging to your personality.
I spent whatever money I could get hold of on getting rid of them.
because pimples are ugly, and if you are ugly—
that's it!

yes, I wanted to have a nice personality
and I had girlfriends who had nice personalities.
and because our boyfriends at school always said
we girls shouldn't get mixed up in their fights,
I stuck to that.
so I became very popular with the guys and very popular
with the teachers, too, because I never got mixed up in any fights.
I never got into trouble.

my parents liked that, they got me some real nice dresses, in return,
and my boyfriend would pay for the movies when we went out.
but sometimes, when things were happening in the city,
like the highschool-strike last year, I got frightened
when I saw black girls give the fist-sign to black guys
and heard them shout slogans.
they even fought cops in the streets.
they also fought us when we wanted to go to school
instead of shutting it down with them.
that really frightened me. it frightened my girlfriends and the guys, too
it frightened all of us.

and all these people on welfare—all these black welfare mothers
who make trouble and yell at Lindsay and throw rocks at Rockefeller.
they don't act like they should act.
they don't act like we're supposed to act.
they are not like we are—
and that frightens me.
I hate school—more or less—it's a drag,
and the teacher's too.
but that's the way things are; there is nothing I can do about it.
so I won't do anything about it.
so that's the way things will remain, I guess.

sometimes, however, when my father threatens me,
when my teachers scream at me, when my boyfriend slaps me—
I wish I could be running through the streets, too,
taking a rock and throwing it at all of them; at my father,
my teachers, and my boyfriend.
for their screaming at me, their threatening me,
their shutting me up, their ordering me around,
for their SITTING ON ME.
GET OFF MY BACK YOU MOTHERFUCKERS—
I FEEL LIKE THROWING YOU OFF OF ME!!!
but I never could do that.

instead I went to a city college for a few years.
nearly became a teacher but got married instead.

and now, I cook for my husband every day.
because my husband has to be fed.
he has to be fed well because he has to work 8 hours every day.
his work is important to him—since he has to do it anyway
it better be important—that's what he says,
therefore my cooking is important to keep him working well.

cooking does not feel like important work to me,
but you can't have it both ways—
and I have my husband.
when my husband is angry at his work and at his boss,
he gets angry at me.
when he is angry at me,
I cook better food and more food
so that when he goes back to his work and his boss,
he is not angry anymore.

I, too, get angry when he is angry.
so I wash all the dishes, I scrub the floors,
and kill all the cockroaches
till I'm not angry at him or his boss anymore.

when my husband says "shut up" to me
while the ballgame is on, I'd better shut up.
otherwise hell would break loose.
he says during the day he follows orders—
so at night—it better be me following orders.
I guess that makes sense.

when my husband hears the news on TV
about all the chaos going on in this country and about the war,
he gets upset. I get upset, too.
I get upset about anything that upsets my husband.
so I tell him to ignore all the chaos, it's not worth the trouble,
I bring him his beer, I put my arm around him.
and we make love, if it's not too late already
but no good!

he hates that war because it's an ugly war without end—he says
I hate that war because it gets in the way.
it destroys the peace, what little there was, between my husband
and his boss. they disagree on that war.
it destroys the pleasure my husband gets from TV.
even the ballgame is no escape anymore.
instead of commercials in between,
they sometimes have news bulletins.
I hate that war because it got in the way of my husband and me.

each month, either the rent goes up
or the taxes or the doctor's bill.
I don't know whom to blame or what to do,
but something better happen soon.

each month it seems, the more Nixon talks about that war,
the Vietnamese are only fighting that much more.
even when their huts are burned to the ground
and their fields destroyed—
they are fighting for their freedom—they say.

each week in the supermarket the prices have changed.
I can't keep it up, my husband just doesn't make enough.
I can't even trust the guy in the grocery store anymore.
each week the blacks in the city are shutting down a school,
take over a hospital or a welfare-center.
even when they go to jail—
they are fighting for their freedom, they say.

each day when I cook I get angrier
and killing cockroaches or washing the laundry
doesn't help anymore.
because cooking just isn't important if that's all you are doing,
besides cleaning the dishes and scrubbing the floor
and all that other stuff.

and shutting up when your husband tells you to.
all that doesn't make sense anymore.
I just hate the way I'm living.
Its dead, it feels rotten inside, its a bore.
that war in Vietnam has started a war
between my husband and me.

because—I just cant go on as usual anymore.
I cant—

you motherfucking husband, you motherfucking boss of his,
you motherfucking guys on the streets, and that is every single one of
you—
with your snide remarks as if every woman
was a piece of meat on display in the supermarket—
you rotten city, you rotten government, you bloody war machine—
you MOTHERFUCKERS GET OFF MY BACK
I just cant take all the shit anymore!!

I cant spend my time cooking specialties anymore
while napalm sets children afire.
I cant spend my time reading "woman's day" anymore
while my friends, right and left, are fighting in that bloody war.
I cant spend my time staring at "the beverly hillbillies"
while my husband gets ordered around by a guy

who grows rich from that war.
and I wont spend my time lying to my children
and telling them to defend "America" anymore.

NO—I wont spend my time curling my hair
while the people on welfare starve to death
because Nixon needs more guns for Nixons war.
I wont spend my time teaching my daughter to say "thank you"
when politicians tour the city to ask how she is,
while black and white GI's are shoved into stockades
because they refuse to kill Vietnamese in that war.

I wont waste my life talking softly, walking nicely and staying
away from trouble anymore.
I wont keep peace at home anymore.
I wont calm my husband down anymore with a beer and a ballgame.
If he is angry at his boss—I tell him to get angrier.
until he is angry enough to fight back
together with all the other guys, the black guys,
who are angry and who are fighting already.
If he is afraid and yells at me, instead—
I wont be there by the time he is finished yelling—
because we have work to do.
because no beer and no ballgame
no niceness and prettiness is going to do shit for us!
nothing and no one can change the mess we're in
unless **WE DO IT AND WE DO IT NOW!**
unless we—like the Vietnamese and the black people
and the GI's and the high school students and the welfare mothers,
unless we—
WOMEN—
rise up—rise up together and rise up angry.
unless we—
WOMEN—
fight—and fight—and fight harder
for everything that will set us free
and the Vietnamese, and the blacks and all other people
and now—that we have begun—there can be no stopping us,
until everything that has kept us and all people down—
COMES DOWN ! ! !
and that means:
dolls that prepare us for Max Factor
have to **COME DOWN.**
schools and teachers that make us accept

America's wars and its lies
have to COME DOWN.
all banks, landlords and doctors
who eat us up alive
have to COME DOWN!
Nixon and Laird and Mitchell, and all the other pigs,
the Pentagon and its generals and its bombs
WILL COME DOWN
because the Vietnamese are winning
and Nixon is losing that war.
and we are part of that war.
we will keep on fighting
until all occupation troops are out of Vietnam,
out of the schools, out of the black communities.
Until all of these troops, these guns, these wars,
until these bosses
their threats, and our fears,
have COME DOWN
until we—and all people are FREE!



FLASH

If you were locked up for 400 years for being the
color of tar
If you were locked up for over 2000 years for having
a female body;

How would you survive?

Well after the first 20 years, you adjust. Withdraw.

Loose your ambitions. Labor—you MUST work
or die Keep up the treadmill; so you
dry those tears of self,
for the self, in the soil.

Your children, they have more leisure . . . but they are
seen, still thru distortion, as being female, or brown,
or gay, or Chinese, or Jew, or Indian, as being
handicapped, and different And so you keep your own
sweet music locked up inside of yourself.

And that is called counter-revolutionary prejudice.

And it is not of the people.

It is not of the future

So it must be educated out, in this present!

This place exudes its soil.

People who were hurt here, didn't become better.

Most of us became more narrow. I am selfish; no one
cares for me; they don't pay My bills, so they won't
tell me

what to do, or how to live. Or Give. Those ordinary rats
roaches and twolegged lice oppress me. Shitwork

doesn't make transcendental saints . . and the pain?

It was just BAD

It's not worth the miscarriages in countyhospital where
They won't help you, not stopping the blood, leaving you
die, when they see you tried to abort yourself . . . It's not
worth the lovemaking, if they leave you lay in the cold cart
stretcher in tilehallways, till any impartial time. It's
not worth childbirth if only males go first, or people
without color, or people with money—

I remember the passerbys stopping to stare at me. Your
cold wind rocked me to my foundations, my friend!
Homosexual, you cannot BE; even in this lost society—
You think you're better in your rags, than your sister—
You make steel your eyes (The same as mine.) QUEER.
But I know your old motives, and my own passions, and
all the latent people, itching with birth, but afraid to be
real Humanity, we are afraid to confess how fragile, how
clean, how beautiful you were when
you were born crying . . .
Now you're hard
Your shit stinks with a healthy smell. Saints, and
not saints So lets awaken to the thief!

Flash

i like to think of harriet tubman

I like to think of Harriet Tubman.
Harriet Tubman who carried a revolver,
who had a scar on her head from a rock thrown
by a slave-master (because she
talked back), and who
had a ransom on her head
of thousands of dollars and who
was never caught, and who
had no use for the law
when the law was wrong,
who defied the law. I like
to think of her.

I like to think of her especially
when I think of the problem of
feeding children.

The legal answer
to the problem of feeding children
is ten free lunches every month,
being equal, in the child's real life,
to eating lunch every other day.
Monday but not Tuesday.

I like to think of the President
eating lunch Monday, but not
Tuesday.

and when I think of the President
and the law, and the problem of
feeding children, I like to
think of Harriet Tubman
and her revolver.

And then sometimes
I think of the President
and other men,
men who practise the law,
who enforce the law
who live behind
and operate through
and feed themselves
at the expense of
starving children
because of the law,
men who sit in paneled offices
and think about vacations

and tell women
whose care it is
to feed children
not to be hysterical
not to be hysterical
not to be hysterical as in the word
hysterikos, the greek for
womb suffering,
not to suffer in their
wombs,
not to care,
not to bother the men
because they want to think
of other things
and do not want
to take the women seriously.
I want them to think about Harriet Tubman
and remember,
remember she was beat by a white man
and she lived
and she lived to redress her grievances,
and she lived in swamps
and wore the clothes of a man
bringing hundreds of fugitives from
slavery, and was never caught,
and led an army,
and won a battle,
and defied the laws
because the laws were wrong, I want men
to take us seriously.
I am tired wanting them to think
about right and wrong.
I want them to fear.

I want them to feel fear now
as I have felt suffering in the womb, and
I want them
to know
that there is always a time to make right
what is wrong,
there is always a time
for retribution
and that time
is beginning.

dear Sisters, beautiful Sisters

Spring is here.

Straight Sisters, Gay Sisters

Spring is here.

Black Sisters, Third World Sisters

Spring is here.

Sisters,

Spring,

is here.

Sisters!



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