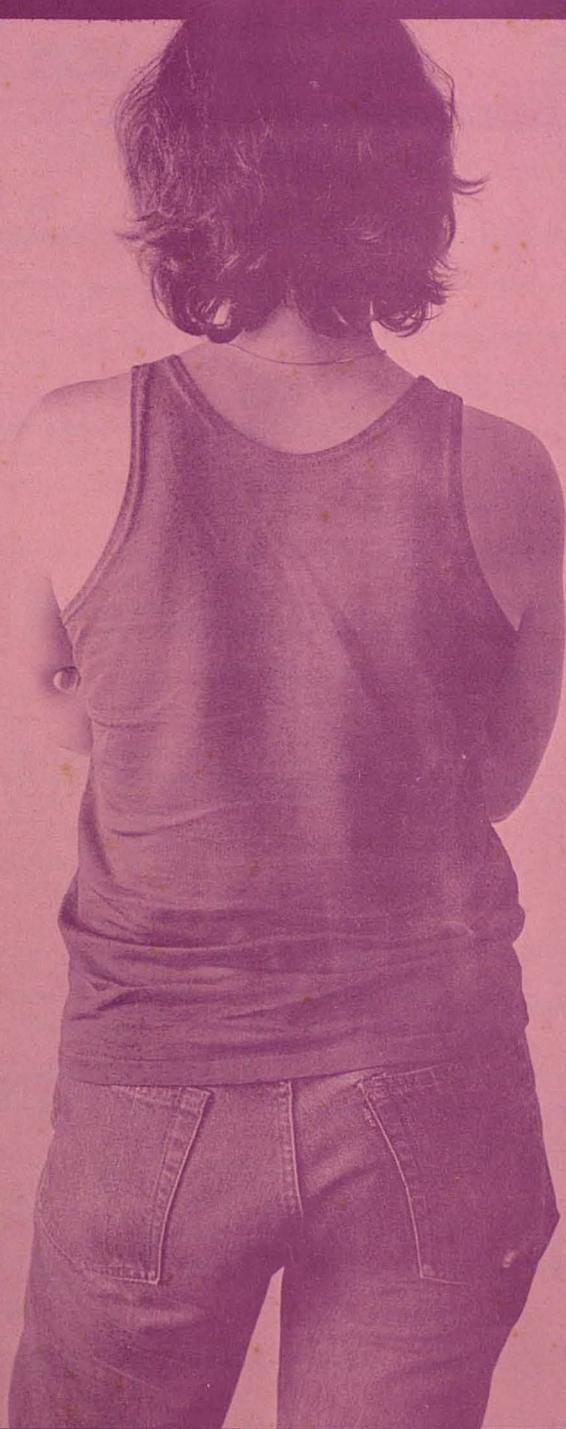


# SINISTER WISDOM



*Bad Attitude*



# SINISTER WISDOM 12

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Imagination in All Women*

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Founders and publishers: Harriet Desmoines & Catherine Nicholson

Editors: C. Colette, Harriet Desmoines, Catherine Nicholson, Carolyn Shafer

Poetry Editor: Susan Leigh Star

Review Editor: Julia Penelope

Contributing Editors: Sarah Hoagland, Beth Hodges, Mab Segrest

Cover Design by Beth Hodges

Cover photographs by J.Z. Grover

Staff: Edy Ambroz, C. Colette, Lynda Koolish, Cheryl Long,  
Vicki Nogle, Julia Penelope, Donna Saunders, Moni Usasz

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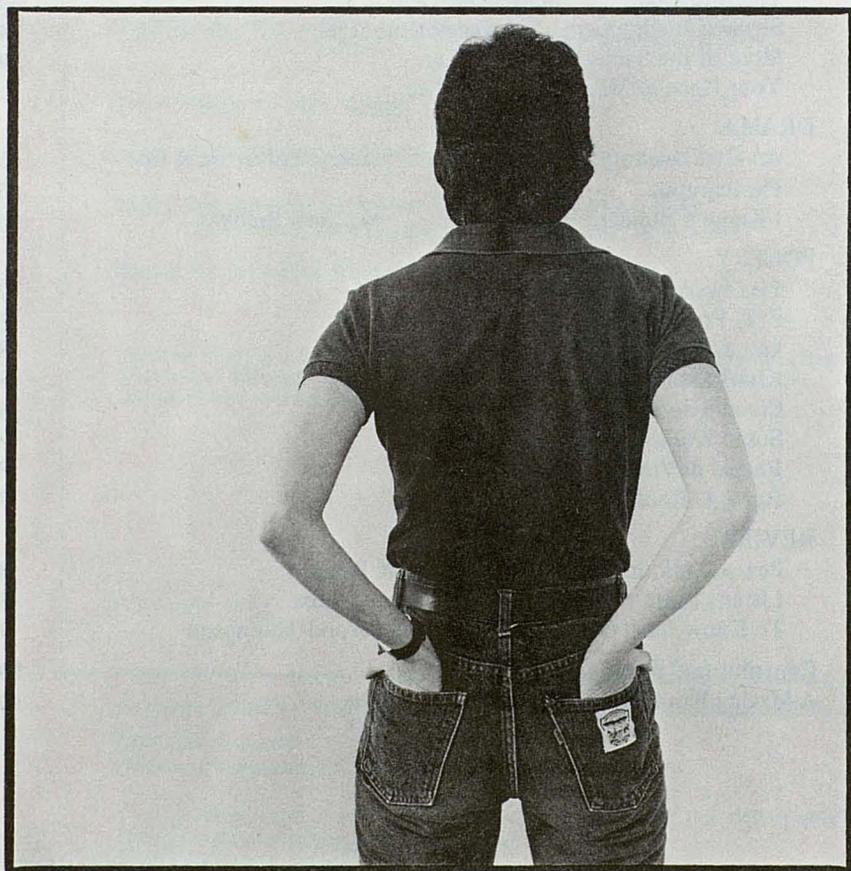
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# THEORY



*Bad Attitude*

*June 79*

## COSMIC ANARCHISM: Lesbians in the Sky with Diamonds

### Take Back the Night

Tonight, walking together, we will proclaim to the rapists and pornographers and woman-batterers that their days are numbered and our time has come. . . . The truth is that we have to take back the night every night, or the night will never be ours. And once we have conquered the dark, we have to reach for the light, to take the day and make it ours.<sup>1</sup>

—Andrea Dworkin

Duality, no matter which opposite is preferred, gives us only two choices. . . . Women have the ability, despite our programming, to think in ways that negate dualities . . . to move between and amid opposites, to feel gradations and complexities.<sup>2</sup>

—Barbara Starrett

On November 18, 1978, the women of San Francisco took to the streets for a Take Back the Night march as part of the Feminist Perspectives on Pornography Conference. Thousands of women literally shut down Broadway (the city's main thoroughfare for strip shows and porn shops) while Holly Near sang "Fight Back" and a huge float symbolizing woman's sexual oppression was pulled through the crowd with accompanying theater action. The feeling seemed to be one of great excitement at our collective womanstrength and energy: we were all *together*, completely blocking off the streets.

It was immediately after the singing and theater that some division began to appear in the crowd. The organizers and monitors were clearly into moving everyone on toward the park a few blocks away where a celebration/meditation was to take place. And, of course, they had police cooperation in this; this was all part of what had been planned for and accepted as part of a "peaceful demonstration." Most women started walking toward the park; yet voices could be heard protesting, "Is this *all* we're going to do? Look at all that porn just sitting there!" And, undeniably, there sat everything—books, photos, strip shows—just as before the march. Barkers and male patrons stared, snarled or laughed at the women demonstrators passing by, but their "pleasures" were still available to them. I personally felt very frustrated that with thousands of us out there marching, we did not do something more specifically aimed

at destroying some of that smut. Yet, it would have to have been carefully planned and executed, to prevent any of us from getting trapped *in* the stores by police or male customers. Still, I felt something more could (indeed, *needed* to) have been done. We were too much the “good girls,” well-behaved, following the rules.

When we arrived at the park, I felt even more jarred by the contrast between the events there and those in the streets. A small stage was set up, candles flickered, and wind chimes tinkled gently as one woman led a “meditation”: “*Feel* your body, close your eyes, and link arms with the woman beside you; feel your collective energy; *feel* how you’ve been changed by tonight’s march.” The effect was almost sleep-inducing. I felt as if someone were handing me sleeping tablets after an attack by a rapist. It seemed inappropriate; not wrong or bad *per se*, just somehow inappropriate to the time and place. As I turned to leave, a group of women at the edge of the crowd started shouting angrily, “We’re not mystics—we want armed struggle!!” And I thought, “Here it is again—the same old split—spirituality *versus* politics.”

The events of that evening came to symbolize for me the spiritual/political division within the women’s movement and also made obvious to me my own inability to choose either. I’m not interested in meditating *during* a demonstration; nor do I wish to copy male wargames with “armed struggle.” So where does that leave me, and others like me, who feel split by these polarities? Hopefully, it places us in the position of choosing something altogether different, not an either/or but a both/and. And I don’t mean scotch taping meditation and armed struggle together like the old masculine/feminine androgyny trap. Both/and means to me something entirely New; it means *avoiding all closed systems* (and other patriarchal traps) and weaving from *many open visions* a multidimensional tapestry which combines action/thought/being/becoming and allows for individual transformation process as well as for collective growth and insight. This is a Dream, right? Yes, most definitely. And it is Reality too. But Dreams, Realities—in the plural, meaning outside of linear, one-dimensional options. To take back the night *and* the day; to choose many voices, faces, ways of being. For me, this means movement with/in the visions that are: anarchism, nonviolence, lesbianism, and feminist spirituality, which, when overlapped and intertwined, share an openendedness allowing for future leaps of consciousness. These four visions also share a common invisibility and/or denigration in prevailing patriarchal systems (straight- as well as counter-culture). This is significant, I think, in that often those things most hated/feared by male culture are also those most deeply revolutionary for women’s lives. Reclamation is part of the re/vision of our past with/in the present and toward the future.

Why do I choose these *particular* four areas to context my vision of utopian transformation? Aren’t even these words/names limiting in some way? Not, I think, if we see each as integrally connected to the others; not if we remember to see words (and language itself) as *metaphor*. The more visions we collect, the more words we *invent* to describe/symbolize our experience, the more open we become to creating a future unlimited by categorization and restriction. Thought hierarchy is as dangerous as political hierarchy; indeed,

they feed into each other. So when I identify myself as a lesbian or an anarchist, I use those words as *metaphors*, as directional indicators pointing the way toward a revolving sphere of ideas that make up my own personal vision of what the future can be. I feel that visional sphere constantly overlapping with other women's spheres, and in writing this now, I am attempting to visualize those overlaps (for myself and others) in order to help us all out of the traps of either/or dialectics. I am also trying to write in an antilinear way, meaning that each part of this article should be seen as connected to the whole, a *multidimensional* whole, which continues to *spin beyond* the words I use to describe it. Ideally, there is no beginning or end to this article—but rather an ever-expanding Center. Writing it is a centering process for *me*.

### Women and Nonviolence—An Anarchist Perspective

Today is the parent of tomorrow. . . . No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the *means* used to achieve it be identical in spirit and tendency with the *purposes* to be achieved.<sup>3</sup>

—Emma Goldman

The feminist vision . . . abandons the concept of naming enemies and adopts a concept familiar to the nonviolent tradition: naming behavior that is oppressive, naming abuse of power that is held unfairly and must be destroyed, but naming no one *person* whom we are willing to destroy.<sup>4</sup>

—Barbara Deming

Nonviolence, sometimes called “pacifism,” has a bad reputation on the left. Somehow it's gotten identified with nonresistance or pacifity, or else it's been used by those in power to defend property rights. Women, in particular, feel a lot of confusion over nonviolence since fighting back has been something that we have needed to develop for our own survival, and to remain passive would be to accept our victimization. But nonviolence is not in opposition to direct action and can in fact be used in conjunction with it.

To define terms, I would call violence “the intent to kill or physically violate (as in rape).” I would not call destruction of property violence. And, for me the term antiviolent resistance more closely approximates what I mean by nonviolence. This means, for women specifically, learning self-defense, learning to fight back, but *without* intent to kill. Admittedly someone could get killed anyway (when you're fighting for your life in the street, necessity is the final decisionmaker), but the chances of death would be *less*, I think, if the intent is *not* to kill. The important thing then would be to prepare oneself by learning the most effective nonviolent resistant tactics possible. And to me, learning to use guns for “armed struggle” is assuming an intent to kill. I find the thought of women using guns (as policewomen *or* as guerilla fighters) very upsetting. It's the same old male cops and robbers game, and women keep getting sucked into it. And when it's in the name of revolution, the guilt trip is really heavy, i.e., nonviolence is for armchair liberals and other bourgeois individualists afraid to dirty their lily-white hands. (For years I guiltily hid my deep emotional commitment to nonviolence for fear of being thought “middle class” or “unrealistic.”)

Of course, nonviolence often *is* advocated from the safety of middle-class

armchairs, but we must not confuse phony liberalism with revolution. And where the revolutionary part comes in is the linking up of nonviolence with anarchism, anarchism meaning the struggle for a nonhierarchical, antiauthoritarian society based on belief in spontaneity/organization, direct action, collectivity/individuality, and equal, powerfree relationships.<sup>5</sup> In anarchist theory, the means create the ends. Thus, if one wants a nonviolent society, one must act in a way to achieve that—not only without violence but *against* violence. If one kills, one is perpetuating a killer society. So, if we believe this, how do we, as women, fight back effectively without using violence?

There are a myriad of ways that women are *already* using—martial arts skills, for self-defense against rape and other forms of male violence; anti-violent resistance techniques learned in workshops for strikes or demonstrations, particularly those being developed in the antinuke movement (continuing a long tradition of nonviolence in this country—from woman's suffrage up through the civil rights and peace movements); underground direct actions like spray painting, ripping off or destroying pornography, public exposure of rapists, street theater; and the more long-range revolutionary preparatory work, i.e., creating alternatives *now* and sharing skills and visions with as many people as possible (through talking, writing, support groups, etc.). This last is an extremely crucial area because it emphasizes an area of revolution that has been denigrated by men in favor of the more flamboyant us-against-them, kill-the-oppressor tactics. But look where it has gotten them: in no country on earth has there been a successful revolution—meaning the creation of a truly egalitarian, powerfree society. And, if we leave it to the men (and male ideology), that's exactly the way it will remain.

We need womanvision to pull all the parts together, to see the importance of *all* parts to the whole. Not surprisingly, it was Emma Goldman who, after two terrible years in Russia trying to believe in the Bolshevik Revolution, wrote:

My Russian experience has made me see what I did not before, namely the imperative necessity of intensive educational work which would help emancipate people from their deep-rooted fetishes and superstitions. With many revolutionists I foolishly believed that the principal thing is to get people to rise against the oppressive institutions and that everything would take care of itself. . . . But I have come to the conclusion that the amount of violence in any revolution will depend entirely upon the amount . . . of inner preparation . . . the growth out of old habits and ideas. I know that this is a difficult process, and yet people will have to realize the process and will have to be willing to go through it, if revolutions are not to end, as they have in the past, in a new despotism which out-tyrannizes the old.<sup>6</sup>

And that's what the current women's movement has been working on for more than a decade now—that “growth out of old habits and ideas”—particularly all the old patriarchal traps of thinking and behavior based on hierarchy, submission to authority, and subject/object relationships. We are not going to sink slowly to our deaths with men leading the way. It is time we claimed with pride our commitment to nonviolence and “inner preparation” which will create a woman's revolution beyond all the old male definitions and aborted attempts. Women have new words, new visions, new ways of being in the world. In turning away from violence and polarity, we affirm life and open ourselves to new understanding of our own living consciousness.

## Spiritual Dimensions—Life, Death, Dreams, and Other Realities

Our culture gives official recognition only to experiences that reinforce its own belief structures. . . . we're taught from childhood to respect authority and to look to others to confirm our perceptions of reality, which is based on certain agreements as to what is real and what is not. . . . The aspects of the psyche must be squeezed to fit the cultural medium.<sup>7</sup>

—Jane Roberts

Sisterhood as cosmic covenant means beginning to re-name the cosmos.<sup>8</sup>

—Mary Daly

I am a woman, a part of and the whole of the first circle, the circle that transcends space and time, the circle of women joined.<sup>9</sup>

—Ann Valiant

We live in a materialistically defined world. We are surrounded by linear, one-dimensional explanations of the universe and of our place in it. Western science and technology reign supreme, and religion (east or west) is shackled by convention, narrowmindedness, hierarchy, and woman hatred. Man stands at the center of his world and, quite literally, looks down on all that is around him. He can see nothing except in relation to himself: even his gods reflect his own self-importance. Living in this world, women must either worship His image or risk repudiation, ostracism, or death by fire. You either believe or you are an unbeliever, an outcast, a pagan, a witch. From time immemorial, women have been denied the validity of our own perceptions, our own intuitive wisdom. We have been outcasts, unable even in our own minds to throw off entirely the umbrella of patriarchal thought.

Growing up in middle America, I thought my spiritual choices were either religion or atheism. My own parents were agnostics, and raised me without any formal religious training. At about six years of age, I developed a terror of death and infinity, which would come to me each night before sleep. Tearfully, I would try to explain the fear to my mother, "The world just goes on forever and ever." It was that eternal nothingness, void of meaning, which scared me so.

As I grew older, I learned ways to block the fear, to distract myself before sleep. By the time I was in college, I called myself an agnostic ("you can't ever know") but was still troubled off and on by those nighttime death/infinity fears. Eventually, these fears invaded my days too, and for one long period of my college years I was paralyzed by despair—both at the political/physical reality of racist, wartorn America and at the metaphysical inevitability of death. And it was the latter, spiritual hopelessness, which gnawed away at whatever political visions I gradually came to believe in. Always at the back of my head was the thought: What do Utopian dreams matter if we're all going to die anyway? When I actually thought about it, the only two options I could imagine were eternal life or eternal death (nonexistence), both of which frightened me. Then, one day, a friend said to me, "Maybe there's something else, different from either of those, something you can't even imagine now." It was the first time I had even considered such a possibility.

Looking back now, I feel real anger that I was robbed of all those other options, robbed of my intuitive expansion and spiritual imagination. Not angry

at my parents, for they also were robbed, but at this society which posits everything in either/or, one-dimensional terms. I am angry that I was robbed of a pride in woman's wisdom through the ages: in healing; in psychic communication; in astrology, dreams, the occult; in all nonverbal, nonmaterial ways of being with/in the world. For years, I thought all those things were silly—because I was *trained* to believe that. Uniquely female abilities and knowledge have always been denigrated as have all other things female. It was only in learning to love myself as a woman and other women-loving women that I broke through all my own prejudices against woman's spirituality. I say *woman's* spirituality deliberately because I believe patriarchal spirituality to be more of the same old male power trips. It is the linking of spirituality with radical feminism that points to revolutionary transformation.

Six years ago, I participated in a weekend workshop in Womancraft (the development of psychic skills) and read *The Seth Material* by Jane Roberts and *Beyond God the Father* by Mary Daly. Those three experiences started reverberations within me that changed entirely my way of seeing the universe. The Seth books knocked the life/death polarity out of my head, opened me to seeing death as something other than terrifying, and helped me understand how authoritarian politics also oppresses the psyche. Mary Daly made the crucial connection between the women's movement and spiritual revolution. And the womancraft experience put me in touch with my own psychic potential. These were major breakthroughs, and they didn't occur instantaneously, but rather slowly, over time, through space. Many other voices, from books and from friendships, added further visions to my own searching process.

I learned to record my dreams, to see them as possible other realities, as other parts of myself, as symbols/stories giving me wisdom/information about my life and life itself. I learned to see that this particular physical reality in which we exist is not necessarily the *only* one, that there may be innumerable others running parallel to our own, that we can open to these parallel universes *through* our dreams, through developing our psychic abilities. I learned to see time as not necessarily sequential, but simultaneous—it is *we* who move through time and space in our lives. I learned that if the past/present/future are seen as simultaneous, then it makes sense that we can time-travel with relative ease in our dreams—a more open state of consciousness. I also learned to develop my own precognitive sense, to alter my habitual state of consciousness, and to open to long-distance communication through dreams. I came to understand that my physical self is not all there is to my being, that reincarnation and other parallel selves are also possible. And, most important to me, I learned to see that death can be seen as *transition*, not extinction, that the transformations of consciousness are limitless—way, way beyond our sense of them in this physical dimension bound by laws and logic.

It was with women that I discovered these things, and this is not, I believe, coincidental. Women hold the keys to open doors yet undreamed of, and it is through our dreams and visions that we will find the doors and open them, our own voices guiding us throughout.

This article is a statement of open celebration of feminist spirituality—as a revolutionary lifeforce and political energizer. It is also an attempt to sidestep the doublebind of materialism (“we are body, period; revolution = changes in concrete, material conditions”) versus blissed-out spiritualism (“we are soul,

period; in the cosmic view, all events are appropriate"). These choices are traps. For one thing, they keep us in the patriarchal either/or framework, and for another, they obliterate all the connections *between* things which, once seen, transcend the necessity of opposites and categorization. Women *see* these connections when they turn their backs on the old male skeletons of politics and spirituality and move into their *own* visions of being and becoming. Women understand that changes in consciousness (and in perceptions of consciousness) are at the core of revolutionary change and that those deep, soulshaking, transformations are also the most profound energy sustainers. It is the spirit of hope within us that will keep us going when all else fails. To see being as indestructible energy, death as continuation not obliteration, and revolution as psychic as well as political movement is the vision of feminist spirituality.

It is change and growth on *all* levels simultaneously that I am talking about here. If I change the way I think/feel/perceive, I change the world as much as when I change my physical behavior (and each supports the other). The key idea of psychic politics is that we can develop our mental skills to have an even greater effect on the world around us. The way people see society does have an effect on how they play out reality day to day. Racism, sexism, ageism, classism, etc. are not just logical outcomes of economic conditions; they also come from a way of looking at the world—from the authoritarian mentality that posits top/bottom necessity, whether it be god, king, president, dictatorship of the proletariat, or father/boss/policeman. The bias (straight-white-male-middle-class-adults) is obvious; what is not as clear is that a gay-black-female-working-class-adolescent would be *no different* if the notion of hierarchical necessity is not totally *abolished*. This is important, for it stresses the absolute necessity of changing belief systems, of opening to circular/spiral vision rather than linear, reductionist thought. For what we believe *does* shape our lives, *all* of us. It is our belief in the need for authority in our lives that keeps us prisoners as much as the external authority figures who oppress us in our daily lives. We have been systematically robbed of our ability to make decisions for ourselves, to know what is right for us, so much so that we no longer even know what freedom is. In this country, people think it is in giving away their decision-making to a "representative" who will vote in our best interests. This is no more than the old belief in a benevolent dictator, the kindly patriarch in the sky who will lead us by the noses through eternity.

It is time women recognized these lies for what they are. It is time we looked within ourselves and to each other for the models for social processes that *do* not oppress, for relationships that are not based in power, and for political/spiritual visions that are open/ing and multidimensionally expansive. We will find there a circle of sisters who have been struggling through endless dark ages of male history to create a new kind of reality and to make it both visible and viable to others. That circle is ever growing.

### Zone of the Free Radicals—Lesbian Out-Laws

I think men mostly have to learn to be anarchists. Women don't have to learn.<sup>10</sup>

—Ursula K. LeGuin

Lesbian feminism is created as an altered state of consciousness . . . by women who are willing to question the perceptual bases of our worlds.<sup>11</sup>

—Susan Leigh Star

. . . the matrices we weave  
web upon web, delicate rafters  
flung in audacity to the prairie skies  
nets of telepathy contrived  
to outlast the iron road  
laid out in blood across the land . . .<sup>12</sup>

—Adrienne Rich

I am an anarchist. I am also a lesbian. I see a connection there. To me, lesbians have the potential of being the truly dis-possessed, the wild, cosmic anarchists. First, our spirituality is moving away from the old patriarchal hierarchies. Our direction is toward fuller awareness of and connection with the many levels and forms of consciousness; we do not seek labels such as God or even Goddess. We do not look for an ultimate Authority, a Final Answer to all questions. Rather, it is the process of expansion we desire, the journey itself, without beginning or end. Second, we see that the means are the ends; the way we live together now, as peaceful women-loving women in equal relation to one another, is the future as much as it is the present. We see the simultaneity of time, the relationship between being and becoming. We also know the importance of the part and the whole, the individual and the collective, that ultimately we are all connected, that beyond life/death polarity is cosmic continuity in which individual and collective consciousness is experienced as one. For, indeed, feminist revolution is based in the connections between womenfriends, networks which span miles and years and touch the deepest, most complex layers of our being.

I sit here alone writing this in a small apartment in Berkeley; yet I feel with me the presence of countless womenfriends, from childhood right up to the moment. The women I lived with and worked with during the years my home was in Boston are as present to me as my high school “best friends” of fifteen years ago in Illinois or my California friends now. For me, that network of women is very much alive, as each day I move through the past, present, and future in my mental and physical activities. Consciousness is not restricted by time or space. I may meet my friends repeatedly in memory or dreams. Recently, I’ve learned to be more observant, as well as validating, of these experiences, particularly because of my work with dream recall. The underside of consciousness *is* knowable; we can learn to explore and expand it and share our voyages with one another. And, yes, these explorations *are* important, not frivolous or weird, as many would have us believe.

The male world has neglected to develop a language to describe such experiences. Indeed, the lack of words has often left women completely invalidated, even robbed of the experience itself (for if you can’t describe it in words, it can’t be *real*, right?). An underground of wisewomen, witches, and psychics has always existed, but those who found this kind of support were among the fortunate few. Yet, now I believe this is changing. More and more, women are discovering in themselves and each other a new spirituality, unlike any we grew up believing (or not believing) in. And I think the women’s

movement is largely responsible. For when women come together and share our lives, we find validation for experiences that we thought were unique. Alone, we are crazy; together, we are mad (in the best sense of the word). What was taken from us is reclaimed. What was lost in loneliness is rediscovered in community.

When I look back on my friendships with women, what stands out in my mind is the excitement of sharing, of deep communication, both verbal and nonverbal. In one of my favorite childhood books, *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne was always searching for a "kindred spirit." She found one in her best friend, Diana. Anne and Diana shared all the secrets of their inner and outer lives, and at night they would send messages to each other across the fields by lighting candles in their bedroom windows. That nightly ritual and the idea of "kindred spirits" have stayed with me all these years; somehow they describe what happens between women, whether or not they call their relationships "lesbian." And I believe all women have that woman-loving self somewhere inside them.<sup>13</sup> It is a love for communication, for sharing, for gentleness, trust and vulnerability, a love for openness, for loving itself. Women come to each other as equals, not to dominate but to share. Women are natural anarchists, as well as natural antiviolent, spiritual, woman-loving beings.

Still, not all women use these words to describe themselves. What of them? The label is not all. I'm talking about potential, about *aspects* of our lives. None of us is Whole; we are all healing, slowly and against great odds. And we all derive womanenergy from those women close to us, regardless of their self-definition.

On the other hand, to choose to be a lesbian feminist is to open oneself to radical transformation. Lesbian feminism brings together all the fragments of what women have shared underground over the centuries and helps to create a whole, healed consciousness. As lesbians, we choose this altered state of consciousness, which is outside of all patriarchal States and subject to no male law, as our own center where all connections become clear, and all sisters clasp hands. We lesbian out-laws have exploded the (normal) State of consciousness and moved into outer space/time. We are in the "Zone of the Free Radicals." A friend shared this term from physics with me a couple of years ago; she in turn had heard of it from another womanfriend.

The Zone of the Free Radicals is an area that is formed when matter and antimatter come together. A terrific explosion of energy occurs and because the charges of these two fields (matter and antimatter) are opposite, a barrier or Zone is built up between them. Frequently, particles escape into this Zone which have a charge that cannot be explained in terms of the polarities of the two fields from which they have escaped; these particles are called the Free Radicals. Their colors are brilliant, their energy highly intense.<sup>14</sup> For me, the Zone of the Free Radicals is an incredibly perfect metaphor for the space beyond polarities in which lesbians are creating a multicolored, multidimensional consciousness and life-energy. It is also the dream layer between one reality and another, the invisible area between white and black holes in space, the filament of consciousness between warps in time/space, *and* the psychic realm where all the threads of lesbianism, feminism, anarchism, nonviolence and spirituality merge and e-merge in joyous res/rev-olution.

The Zone is real. Each day we create it, with our lives, with our connections. The energy within us and between us is multiplying, and our "nets of telepathy" and nightcandles stand out against the sky like diamonds. Taking back the night is just the beginning.

#### NOTES

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9. Womancraft statement from workshop given by Ann Valiant, 1974.
10. Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*, Avon Books, New York, 1974, p. 43.
11. Susan Leigh Star, "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness," *Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 5, p. 87.
12. Adrienne Rich, "For Julia in Nebraska," *Sinister Wisdom*, Issue 10, p. 63.
13. *Sinister Wisdom* has offered a healing for yet another polarity—lesbian/straight—by printing in each issue that *SW* is for the "Lesbian Imagination in All Women."
14. Many thanks to Leigh Star for this description of the Zone of the Free Radicals.



## ON RUNNING, WOMEN, AND THERMODYNAMICS

by Pat Hynes

The instructor defined work as “raising a weight,” “stretching a wire,” “moving any particles in a magnetic field”; a “transient phenomenon, perceptible at boundaries.” He elaborated on its similarities to heat, both being forms of energy, its differences from temperature and pressure. While he searched for qualifying distinctions on the thermodynamics of work, heat and energy, sharp clear images of women moving, stretching, running in undulating waves through Central Park, New York, flooded my mind.

Two days ago, Saturday, June 2, 1979, I ran in the eighth annual 6.2 mile/10 kilometer women’s race through Central Park. This is the largest women’s athletic event in the world: 4,100 women and girls entered. I ran with my sister Veronica. Two other sisters, Mary and Monica, started just ahead of us. Our youngest sister Margie, a promising marathoner, placed herself in front of us to move out quickly.

In defiance of the First Law of Thermodynamics which presumes that the energy of the universe is neither created nor destroyed but is conserved, I found myself after the race not tired nor depleted from the exertion of stretching and raising arms and legs for six miles, but exhilarated and expanded by the sight of young girls running together in teams, mothers and daughters, older women, toned female bodies, and heavy, hard-breathing,

but determined bodies. Be it that this collective image re-called a past female primacy, be it that it conjured up a present/future power, I felt a groundswell of new primal energy released by this event. In defiance of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which posits a tendency towards randomness and disorder in the universe, there was in this event a brief dramatic re-ordering of the universe. On the streets, in the park, on skates, on bikes, in wheelchairs, watching, monitoring, photographing, shouting, yelling were *women*. The sounds, the sights, the sweaty smells, the action, the energy were female. A few men were in quiet attendance, offering water, watching impassively.

During the race I stayed with Veronica for the companionship. She developed a slight abdominal pain at mile two, so we took it easy. Not having to run for time gave us the leisure to savor the next four miles. Going up each hill we would pass a woman in a wheelchair, only to have her whiz by us on the downgrade calling "wheelchair" to warn runners to move aside. I recognized women I had met in a former race by their t-shirts which say in bold-faced letters AAU—Agile Amazons United. Veronica noticed a woman wearing a shirt that said "Jessica's Mom." At the 4.5 mile were Jan and Susan calling to us. Susan was thanked by at least six women after the race (strangers to her) for her cheers and encouragement. Jan, poised for this moment, focused the camera and caught us in triumphant gesture of hands raised in solidarity. At the 5.5 mile, another woman stood aside the running path on a large rock yelling to the crowds of runners, "Come on women, you look beautiful . . . only ½ mile more . . . you can do it."

Sometime during the race Veronica discussed an article she had read in a psychology journal psychoanalyzing running as a denial of death and a quest for immortality. I knew as I lifted one foot past the other that that is not true for me nor for her. I am immortal; I live in the divine spark of Be-ing. I run to tone my body, I run to feel wind and mist in my hair and face, to hear the Sawmill Stream and see soil horizons, pastures and wildflowers. She runs because at 33, she is thrilled to be athletic for the first time in her life. She runs because it is the only hour taken for herself in an otherwise preempted day of nurturing four children and a husband. We, all five of us, have trained since February to run in this race together, impelled by some wild desire to seize a day from this year and make it ours. Instinctively we wished to symbolize our bonds with each other and chose to do so within the largest women's athletic event in history.

*Photograph by Judith Niemi, of the October 1977 women's marathon in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

AMAZON ETYMOLOGY:

ROOTING FOR THE MATRIARCHY\*

Their origin and their history patriarchal  
scholarship their origin and their history.  
Patriarchal Scholarship makes no mistake.  
Patriarchal Scholarship is the same as  
Patriotic Scholarship is the same as patriarchal  
scholarship is the same as patriarchal poetry.  
Patriarchal scholarship is the same.

—Mary Daly (1979, after Gertrude  
Stein), *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics  
of Radical Feminism*

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The purposes are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.

—Adrienne Rich (1973), "Diving into  
the Wreck"

Nine years of formal training in patriarchal academia made me a historical linguist, qualified to discuss the processes by which languages change. Two years later, I began to question everything I had "learned." Only now do I understand how thoroughly I was indoctrinated to accept unquestioningly the assumptions upon which patriarchal (historical) linguistics is based. Catherine Nicholson has asked me to "come out" as a historical linguist, and the only way I can manage that is by means of a contrast between the "findings" of the European male tradition in historical linguistics and the discoveries I have begun to make using its methodology.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the systematic study of language for the purpose of discovering a European "mother-tongue" began.

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\*I must confess to having a feeling of schizophrenia in writing this. I use the singular pronoun throughout because Catherine has asked me to explain how *I* came to be doing this kind of work. Yet some of the research discussed here is the product of my collaboration with Julia Penelope (Stanley). Thus, I ask readers to imagine that I am speaking, to borrow a phrase from Adrienne Rich, "with voices." A different version will be published in the *Women's Studies International Quarterly* (Summer 1980), in an article which Julia and I co-authored.

According to Léon Poliakov (1977), the men who began the search for a prehistoric European language did so for the purpose of tracing their genealogical roots back to a nation that was *not* Semitic. Thus, the earliest beginnings of “linguistic science” sprang from nationalistic fervor combined with anti-Semitism, a desire to identify the “Aryan” heritage of the Indo-European peoples.<sup>1</sup>

Through cross-linguistic comparison of the written records of ancient languages, the patriarchs of western Europe soon determined the extent of the languages they termed “Indo-European” or “Indo-Germanic”: they were and are spoken across continental Europe, from Great Britain to Russia and south into northern India. Confusing language with race and with culture, early linguists contended that the speakers of the hypothetical proto-language they had reconstructed were *their* progenitors, and used the reconstructed vocabulary of Proto-Indo-European to make confident pronouncements about the nature of prehistoric European culture.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, they found *that* culture to have been patriarchal too; in other words, to have had patrilocal institutionalized marriage, patrilineal inheritance from father to son, and patrifocal worship of a chief male deity. They found what they were looking for.

Calvert Watkins’ (1969, pp. 1496-98) introduction to the use of comparative reconstruction shows how effectively linguists have buried their cultural assumptions within the discipline itself, so that they scarcely *have* to make assertions about proto-culture:

A number of Indo-European languages show a similar word for the kinship term ‘daughter-in-law’: Sanskrit *snuṣa*, Old English *snoru*, Old Church Slavonic *snūkha* (Russian *snokhá*), Latin *nurus*, Greek *nuós*, and Armenia *nu*. Albanian has *nuse* in the meaning ‘bride,’ a meaning shared by the Armenian form: in a patrilocal and patriarchal society, where the bride went to live in her husband’s father’s house, ‘daughter-in-law’ and ‘bride’ were equivalent.

All of these forms, spoken of as *cognates*, provide evidence for the phonetic shape of the prehistoric Indo-European word for ‘daughter-in-law’ that is their common ancestor. Sanskrit, Germanic, and Slavic agree in showing an Indo-European word that began with *sn-*. We know that an Indo-European *s* was lost before *n* in other words in Latin, Greek, Armenian, and Albanian, so we can confidently assume that Latin *nurus*, Greek *nuós*, Armenian *nu*, and Albanian *nuse* go back to an Indo-European *\*sn-*. (Compare Latin *nix* [stem *niv-*], ‘snow’ with English SNOW, preserving the *s*.) This principle is spoken of as the *regularity of sound correspondences*; it is basic to the sciences of etymology and comparative linguistics . . . the full form of the word for ‘daughter-in-law’ in Indo-European is *\*snusós*.

It is noteworthy that no single language in the family preserved this word intact. In every language, in every tradition in the Indo-European language family, the word has been somehow altered from its original shape. It is the comparative method that permits us to explain the different forms in this variety of languages, by the reconstruction of a unitary common prototype, a common ancestor.<sup>3</sup>

Watkins’ choice of the cognate which allegedly meant ‘daughter-in-law’ some 3500 years ago is clearly based on his own desire to show that his cultural ancestry is both patriarchal and heterosexual. (He could have discussed words for ‘snow.’) He maintains that the meaning of *\*snusós* remained stable during

centuries of social and semantic change, shifting only slightly to the meaning 'bride' in Armenian and Albanian.

In the same article, Watkins, a renowned Indo-Europeanist, states quite explicitly that both Indo-European religion and society were patriarchal, on the basis of the terms which appear for 'god' in Indo-European:

Yet for the Indo-European-speaking society we can reconstruct with certainty the word for 'god,' \**deiw-os*, and the two-word name of the chief deity of the pantheon, \**dyeu-p<sup>ater</sup>*- (Latin *Jupiter*, Greek *Zeus pater*, Sanskrit *Dyaus pitar*, and Luvian *Tatis Tiwaz*). The forms \**dyeu-* and \**deiw-os* are both derivatives of a root \**deiw-*, meaning 'to shine,' and appearing in the word for 'day' in numerous languages (Latin *dies*; but English DAY is not related). The notion of deity was therefore linked to the notion of the bright sky.

The second element of the name of the chief god, \**dyeu-p<sup>ater</sup>*-, is the general Indo-European word for FATHER. But this word did not refer here to the physical sense of father as parent, but to the social sense of the adult male who is head of the household, the sense of Latin *pater familias*. For the Indo-Europeans, the society of gods was conceived, in the image of their own society, as patriarchal. The reconstructed words \**deiw-os* and \**dyeu-p<sup>ater</sup>*- alone tell us more about the conceptual world of the Indo-Europeans than a roomful of graven images.<sup>4</sup>

In a 1932 doctoral dissertation which Watkins and his fellow linguists manage to ignore, Grace S. Hopkins argues that the term \**deiw-os* was associated with dark, stormy skies and thunderstorms. Her depiction of the thundergod of the Greeks and the Romans bears a striking resemblance to Merlin Stone's (1976) description of the patriarchal god of the later Indo-Europeans. Furthermore, Watkins' own evidence shows the primacy of the male deity to be a late development, since the older languages (Greek and Sanskrit) use a compound term to name him, while the fused form appears only in the later Latin form, *Jupiter*. The name of *Demeter*, the goddess of crops, must be older, on the other hand, since her name is fused even in the Greek.

The research which I have done, alone and in collaboration with Julia Penelope (Stanley), easily proves that male contentions of our patriarchal origins are little more than fantasy. Though his-torical linguists of Watkins' persuasion maintain that early European culture was patriarchal, with a father as married head of the household, their own evidence points in the other direction. I'll offer a few examples of anomalies in their findings (linguistic phallacies) before moving on to the kind of dis-coveries which Amazon linguists can make using the same data.

First, male studies of Indo-European kinship terminology have consistently focussed on terms for 'in-laws,' or the 'husband's relatives.' All of these are said to end in *-er* and *-ter*, the Indo-European kinship suffix *par excellence*. Yet no one has been successful in reconstructing cognates meaning 'husband,' 'wife,' or 'marriage.' Instead, the terms for 'husband' and 'wife' differ from language to language, in each of which they are identical with terms meaning either 'man' and 'woman' or 'master' and 'mistress of the household.'

I was taught that there exists a principle for reconstructing culture through vocabulary: if there are no terms in a semantic field representing a practice or institution, then the practice or institution did not exist. In patriarchal scholarship, however, the linguist *must* assume the eternal dominance of the

father. As a result, kinship terms for 'in-laws' are claimed to be of great antiquity, though they are probably late developments, and the absence of terms for spouses and marriage itself is said to be an accident. Or worse, one male linguist has claimed that the lack of cognate terms for 'marriage' is proof of the inequality between the sexes, because the term \**wedh* ('lead') has given rise to terms for marriage, or 'leading a woman to one's house.' If we accept the premise, on the other hand, that patriarchal invaders attacked and carried off women from matriarchal clans, then the resemblance between related terms for 'wed' and those for 'widow' is *not coincidental*: to 'wed' a woman was to carry her off, to remove her from her clan mothers and sisters.

Second, most linguists adhering firmly to the patriarchal line of inquiry insist that kinship terms are so ancient that they cannot be analyzed—except for the term \**swesor*, from which Modern English *sister* and its cognates descend. They also gloss *all* Indo-European kinship terms as their Modern English, French, or German equivalents, implying or arguing that no shift in meaning has ever occurred. This is patently ridiculous.

Yet \**sunus*, the apparent source of most modern terms meaning 'son,' lacks the characteristic kinship suffix (-*er* / -*ter*). Moreover, its cognates do not appear throughout Europe; the Latin *filiius* is unrelated, and it means 'suckling,' not 'male offspring.' In fact, the word \**sunus* itself is derived from a root meaning 'to give birth,' so its original sense probably had nothing to do with male children either. Furthermore, terms for 'brother' are related to membership in a phratry or to uterine kinship (Greek *adelphós* and *adelphí* are obviously related to *delphús*, the Greek term for 'womb') and cannot be shown—even by the most determined of patriarchs—to demonstrate the importance of male descent and confraternity to the early Europeans. These terms, in fact, suggest a gradual shift from matriliney to patriliney (perhaps by means of the stages proposed by Evelyn Reed in *Women's Evolution*, 1975) but only after the violent patriarchal invasions of southern and western Europe and India.

Terms for 'sister,' descended from Proto-Indo-European \**swesor*, point to a matrifocal culture, although male his-torical linguists steadfastly deny this. \**Swe*, derived from \**seu*, is related to third person pronouns, and terms for the extended social group, the \**swe*. It is connected to Germanic \**sibja-*, meaning 'blood relation' or 'one's own,' and it is also the linguistic ancestor of 'self.' The suffix *-sor* is a feminine suffix. Thus, following the analyses *provided* by patriarchal linguists, \**swesor* means literally 'female who is a member of the clan,' 'she who is one of us.' Though the connection between \**sunus*, derived from a root they have labeled *seu*<sup>3</sup>, and \**swesor*, derived from *seu*<sup>2</sup>, revealed itself instantly to Julia and to me, traditional his-torical linguistics separates the two roots. Both are separated from *seu*<sup>4</sup>, said to give rise to Modern English 'suck.' Yet all are logically connected, originating in the act of giving suck and of taking it—the original act of nurturance. What better source for a term meaning 'sister'?

To perceive such semantic relationships endangers patriarchy; hence, this form of linguistic analysis is usually dismissed by his-torical linguists as 'fanciful.' Although they readily see a connection between the concept of male divinity and 'brightness,' they are blind to possible links to matriarchy. While working within a patriarchal mindset, I dismissed Julia's belief that the

Amazons had existed on the European continent. She contended that male his-torians relegated Amazons to mythical status to conceal the fact that powerful women warriors could exist; I decided she was suffering from para-roid delusions.

But careful historical linguistics supports her hypothesis, as I realized during the 1977 Winter Solstice. Speculating on the specialization of the word *girl* from its original sense ('a child of either sex'), I recalled that *maiden*, Old English *maegden*, was the term originally used for 'young woman.' *Maeg* is the Old English word for 'blood relative,' however. In Old English dictionaries these are separated from the verb *magan*, 'to be able,' its present tense form *maeg*, and its past tense *miht* (from which Modern English *might*, with the senses 'power' and 'is probable,' has developed). Wondering why the two roots were seen as unconnected, I began the research upon which this paper is based.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* lists two Indo-European \**magh* roots. *Magh*<sup>-1</sup> is connected with power and might, and is listed as the source of *magus*, Old Persian for 'member of a priestly caste,' *magi*, and *magic* as well. *Magh*<sup>-2</sup> has the sense of 'to fight,' appears in Old Persian as \**ha-maz-an*, 'the warrior,' and is the source of Greek *Amazon*. The connection between power and warfare ought to have been obvious to linguists, because the Indo-Euro-peans have been described as a war-like people (the 'Ax people') belonging to a culture with a warrior caste. They swept across the European continent, leaving few unrelated languages in their wake, and few Amazons in historical times. The only explanation for their failing to connect \**magh*<sup>-1</sup> with \**magh*<sup>-2</sup> is that the reconciliation of these terms would connect the word *Amazon* to terms for kinship and clan membership as well as to terms for power. As Julia and I have pointed out (1980, to appear), the term *maegden*, usually translated as 'young woman, virgin,' is never connected to *Amazon* by patriarchal linguists—but if *maegden* meant 'free woman, woman unattached to a man' (as we believe *virgin* once did), their interconnection is only too apparent.

In a nineteenth-century Indo-European grammar, August Schleicher (1877, p. 222) analyzed Indo-European \**mater* as a compound, derived from original \**-tar*, an agentive suffix, and the root \**ma*, meaning 'make, produce.' Subjected to such an analysis, the term \**mater* meant initially 'one who brings forth, one who produces' and is related to our Modern English verb *make*. His analysis relates the term \**bhráter*, usually glossed (over) as 'brother,' to the verb \**bher* ('bear' [as in 'bear offspring']). In 1978, Julia and I suggested such a derivation before I had read Schleicher. But we further suggested that all kinship terms may have developed from terms denoting the activities of *women* and their interrelationships in matrifocal clans, rather than kinship within patriarchal, patrilineal families.

I am now firmly convinced that the rationale underlying patriarchal separations of such roots, as well as the insistence of his-torical linguists that kinship terms cannot be analyzed into components, is a willful refusal to discover matriarchy. Amazon etymological studies can provide evidence in support of archeological findings and myths which suggest that our European ancestors were matriarchal in vast areas of Europe, and worshipped a powerful, primal female. Two centuries of so-called 'scholarship' remain to be overturned

by women who can turn the methodology of historical linguistics to non-his-torical purposes.

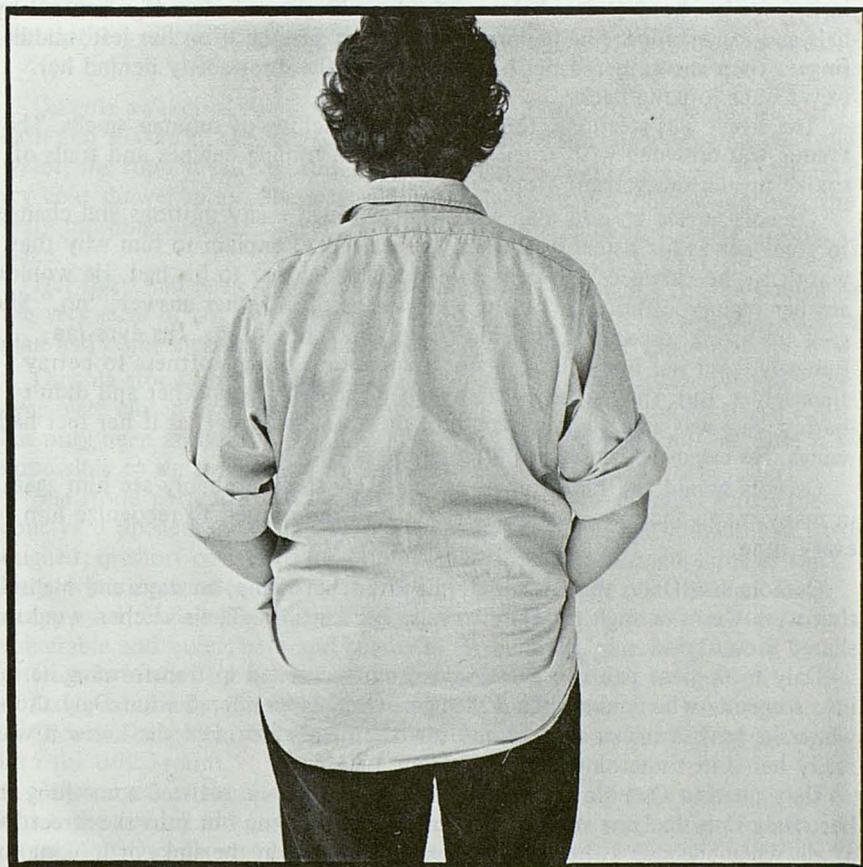
Recent 'research' published in the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* indicates to me that the patriarchs are becoming his-terical as a result of pro-matriarchal findings. Two articles frantically deny that the existence of a term for 'maternal uncle' ('mother's brother') in Latin (*avunculus*), which is derived from a word meaning 'grandfather' (*avus*), points to matriliney. Instead, they contend that *avunculus* refers to a pleasant relationship between a maternal uncle and a nephew *because* the *father* was so powerful in Indo-European society. Perhaps, to borrow a phrase from Julia, our findings have 'scared a couple of pigs out of the bushes.' If two or three Amazons are this effective in the field (of historical linguistics), I believe an army of etymologists cannot fail. It is time we began to find the roots of female power in *our* 'mother-tongue.'

### Notes and References

1. As Poliakov points out, the term 'Aryan' was originally used by certain linguists and anthropologists to refer to the Indo-Iranian peoples as well as their language, the alleged sources of the Indo-Europeans and their language. The findings of the early linguists were used to bolster patriarchal nationalists' contentions that their ethnic and national roots were racially pure and culturally superior.
2. Roz Frank, a Basque and Spanish scholar at the University of Iowa, states that the Basque language, spoken in the western Pyrenees of Spain and France, is probably excluded by his-torical linguists from the Indo-European language family *because* Basque culture still contains matriarchal elements and because the indigenous Basque religion is matrifocal. (Personal communication.)
3. The use of the asterisk (\*) denotes a reconstructed form.
4. Here Watkins, like many other Indo-Europeanists, denies the validity of the extensive archeological discoveries of Marija Gimbutas (1970, 1978). These point to a matrifocal culture worshipping a primordial goddess in a European region around the Mediterranean, Aegean, and Adriatic Seas—an advanced culture violently disrupted by the invasions of patriarchal, pastoral nomads from a region north of the Black Sea. She believes the invaders to have been the original Indo-Europeans. Merlin Stone (1976), on the other hand, identifies northern Europe as the source of Indo-European patriarchy. Both overlook the fact that, because our written evidence for Indo-European was produced thousands of years after the first patriarchal incursions into the motherland, matriarchal customs and vocabulary had centuries to influence the invaders. Some matriarchal terms must have been absorbed into their lexicon, and meanings altered by men from an alien culture.

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# FICTION



*Bad Attitude*

*June 79*

## OSCEOLA AND DALY

To break her midnight fast, Osceola ate: a soft egg and the ground-up shell; a fat peach with brown spots; two pieces of hard, crisp baby toast; a large mug of cold water.

She contemplated going outside that day, and decided it was time to try again. Carefully, she chose her clothing: "Must be sure to pick the right colors, the right textures. Must be sure to feel comfortable and protected or I'll never get to the corner this time." She settled on a brown piece of cloth, wrapping in it from her head to just below the calves; her bare, brown legs covered by hair and sandal rope. She chose the onyx ring, placing it on her left, middle finger. Then she gathered her bags and closed the door softly behind her. Never once looking back.

The street was steaming, though morning; reeking of summer smells. The avenue was crowded with trucks and cars with fuming engines and trails of smoke mysteriously rising from their parts.

Osceola passed an odd man who went through many motions and changes to greet her as his sister. But, when she started to explain to him why that wasn't so, he changed his words and began asking her to his bed. He wouldn't see her plainly, although who she was, was as plain as her answer, "no." She gave up trying to explain. He didn't care about her words. His eyes ran, hungrily, over her body; looking for a curve or a bit of softness to betray themselves. But, the garment was wrapped securely around her and didn't betray. She was able to glide past him there on the street, as if her feet had wings. He began to run after her; grabbing at the air.

Osceola would call him Tomás, as she knew she'd probably see him again in many men's faces on as many streets. And she needed to recognize him every time.

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Osceola saw Daly, though she didn't know her name, on days and nights that were warm enough for Daly to raise her curtains. Their kitchen windows shared a courtyard.

Daly took great pains to dress, and often succeeded in transforming herself into someone who looked like a stranger. Osceola wondered what Daly thought when she looked in her mirrors and saw the man's face. Did she know it wasn't really her—but something borrowed from a stranger?

Daly puzzled Osceola for quite awhile, and then she realized something about her: Daly only had the man's face when she was going out into the street. Not at all, when she was in her kitchen, washing greens in the sink, or looking up at the sky in the morning; her neck arched and glistening in the sun. Not at all, when she brought the woman to her house, late at night; both of them giddy and unsteady from drinking wine. They'd stand naked in candle darkness; kissing each other deep on the mouth and fondling their bodies so tenderly it made Osceola cry—sometimes—reach into the air around her, longing to touch

someone as beautifully. The woman would put out the candle by first, licking her fingers—then touching the flame in one quick motion. Daly would close the window and take the woman's hand, leading her around to her bed at the other side of the house where Osceola couldn't see. She imagined the love they shared. Not at all, at those times, did Daly have the man's face. Not at all. At all.

Daly knew Osceola watched her, but Osceola would hardly let herself be seen. Daly would look up from some task or other and suddenly smile in the direction of Osceola's window. Osceola would squat to the floor; wrapping around herself; rocking on bare feet, gently.

Today, she met Daly's smile with her own, then turned quickly away; putting the things from the stores on the shelf. The two women worked in their kitchens, side by side, but separated by a long, hollow courtyard—and fifty feet—all afternoon.

At dusk, Osceola was the first to light a candle. Daly began dressing, choosing her clothes, carefully; changing her face; planning to go out into the street.

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Osceola awakened early, to see the sunrise. Then, she ran water for her bath and soaked in the tub for nearly an hour. When she stepped out of the water, she rubbed salt vigorously into her skin. She then stepped under an icy cold shower-spray. She wrapped in a towel and sat, looking out over the early morning summer street. It was empty and shimmering under the sun's glaze.

Her sleep had been fitful and semi-conscious. Twice, she had awakened on the very edge of her bed, entangled in sheets and images. It was then that the plan had come clear to her mind—the plan, the problem, the cause.

Osceola stood now, naked and new, in front of her kitchen window. Her eyes were closed as if she were meditating, or sleeping; standing upright. "It has only been an hour," she thought. "She will be awake soon, because it's impossible to sleep any later in this heat. That will be the time."

She stood perfectly still for another hour: until the curtains across the courtyard opened and Daly's form appeared. Daly, tall and long-limbed, strong-thighed; in short cotton pants. Muscled and flexing in striped summer shirt. Daly, watering window boxes of greenery from a large, bent tin can. Daly, sleepy-eyed; focusing across the fifty feet directly in front of her—to Osceola: vulnerable and quiet; bare and beautiful in the great, glass window.

Osceola looked up and smiled at Daly, after a while.

Daly, cautiously, almost timidly—out of character—smiled back.

Osceola forced herself to turn around—about face—and walk out of sight into the other room.

Daly stayed at the window most of the day—finding little things to do for which she needed either the light or the air. Her eyes waited for Osceola to return; but Osceola was asleep. She awoke at sun setting, and decided it was alright to love Daly from afar. She put on a shirt and went back to the window to search for her.

She took her tobacco tin and emptied the sweet smelling leaves onto the wooden table in a pile. Next, taking a piece of rice paper—rolling paper—she scratched on it with her red quill: "I am Osceola and I am prepared to love you entirely, spiritually, from here at my window to there at yours. Do you

accept me? I await your answer.”

She threw the can—with the paper now inside; with one eye closed—directly through Daly’s open bottom window. The noise caused a dog to bark and an old woman’s voice to curse and rise.

Daly retrieved the package and first shook it, lest it explode; then, opened the lid. She took out the paper and read each word carefully. She folded it into small pieces, and put it into her pocket. Shaking her head, Daly opened her front door and was down the five flights of stairs and into the street in no time.

“This calls for a drink! This sure calls for a drink! That woman is crazy!! I always knew she was.” Daly spoke out loud to no one, as she made her way down the street, around the corner, into the bar.

There was nobody there she knew, so she ordered and concentrated on her drink. She read Osceola’s letter again and again. She studied the curves of the letters and the spacing between them. She folded and unfolded the paper—stuffing it in her pocket, then fishing it out to reread.

Later, when people started to drift in and Daly had told the story and showed the evidence countless times—people gave advice:

“Just crazy is all. Lots of that goin’ ’round these days.” “See what else she means. Never look a gift horse in the mouth. She might give it up if you play your cards right.” “Give me her name and address.” “Who is she!!? You said I was the only one in your life!!”

To the last voice, Daly made a move. She bent down, kissed the woman firmly on the mouth and led her onto the small dance floor. Their bodies pressed together under the single red light. The slow steady beat of the juke-box music guided them around the room in sensual steps. Daly whispered in the woman’s ear and the woman moved closer to Daly, encircling her neck with long, bird-like arms.

The liquor and the music, the dancing, went on all night. Near dawn, Daly led the woman up the street, around the corner, up the stairs and into her bed. They loved passionately, exhaustingly: falling asleep entwined in each other’s arms.

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The next day was rainy and cold. Daly and the woman stayed in bed all day; alternately dozing, drinking wine, making love.

That night Daly sent the woman home. Shortly after that there was a thunderstorm.

Osceola spent the day threading beads; boiling soup; reading stories; weeping. That night, she sat, dressed in black, in the middle of the kitchen in a straight-backed chair. She let the electricity from the storm pass through her body and hair, unchanged. The storm’s light reflected in her eyes; alternately lighting the house.

Daly watched Osceola from her own window. She took small sips of iced-water to counteract the hangover she had from drinking wine all day in bed. She watched Osceola and hungered for her; a deep, consuming hunger.

At midnight, they both went to their separate beds and had dreams of madness throughout the night.

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The next gray, wet morning found each standing on her own stoop; looking into the other’s eyes, afraid to speak.

Osceola had her straw shopping basket in hand. Daly had a giant, red umbrella in hers. She raised it over her head and crossed to Osceola's side; taking the basket on her arm and Osceola's hand in her other hand. They headed towards the avenue in the direction of the stores. They bought fresh parsley; garlic; green beans; plum tomatoes; red onions; lemons; black bread. Daly bought a bottle of clear, white wine; promising Osceola a taste. Osceola held tightly to Daly's hand as if to let go would mean slipping back to death. They walked, Daly talked.

They passed Tomas, who was in some other woman's business. Osceola turned clear around to watch him. She walked backwards and watched him for as long as she could see him.

Back in Osceola's kitchen, Daly strung the beans and peeled the onions. Osceola squeezed the lemons, adding cold water and honey to the juice. They cooked everything on the small stove in a big, iron pot and ate hungrily until it had all disappeared into their mouths.

Daly took the wine bottle from the refrigerator. She took a glass and filled it with ice. She sat in Osceola's straight-backed chair, turned sideways, with Osceola in her lap. They sipped the cool wine and Daly told stories, whispering in Osceola's ears.

Osceola turned her face to Daly and their lips met. Daly put her tongue inside of Osceola's mouth, searching for the other. Osceola gently sucked Daly's tongue and darted between Daly's teeth with her own sweet, endless kisses.

After more hours, Osceola went, barefoot and without undergarments, with Daly to her house. Once up the long, winding stairs and inside the door, Daly pulled Osceola's long dress over her head and took her around the corner to her bed. Osceola peeled Daly's body out of the short, tight cotton pants and put her two hands up under Daly's shirt; first clutching her around the waist, then cupping her breasts with her hands.

Daly turned down the sheets and Osceola crawled between them, laying back on the plump goose-feathered pillows. Daly lay herself on top of Osceola. Their flesh melted together. They shut out the world; the sounds of the rain running down the building's side into the courtyard. Osceola found all the secrets of Daly and Daly took all the gifts Osceola offered to her. They rocked themselves in a nighttime lullaby.

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The next morning Osceola said, "Don't tell anyone I love you and you'll stay safe from danger."

Daly said she lived on the edge of danger all the time. That she liked it. Couldn't do without it.

Osceola said, "You will make me weep for you some day."

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"You're a witch! A root woman or something!!" Daly screamed at Osceola. "How can I believe you care for me when I know you can control my every thought and action!?"

Osceola remained silent and still—wrapped in her black robes and the smell of roses. Every word Daly flung wounded her in another place. She flinched from their acidity; ducked from the savageness of the blows.

"Answer me, woman!" Daly demanded. "Speak to me—tell me what happened to the woman last night! Tell me what these powders are!!"

Osceola looked up into Daly's eyes and spoke very quietly . . .

"The woman wanted to leave. She didn't know I knew you. She told me she wouldn't share you with me. She said she didn't know you had a thing for crazy wimmin. She left. She slammed the door so hard it hurt my head and ears. I could hear the sound of her footsteps clear to the bottom landing. She seemed to be stamping out the memory of you.

My powders are for cooking, for bathing, for loving. They come from the earth, like you and me. I would never harm you. I love you. If you think you cannot trust me, you had better go. You had better never look on me again."

Daly sat down slowly and ran her hands through her hair. After a long while she began . . .

"You see, baby, I am not a one woman woman. I can't get jammed up like that. Can't be controlled, used. The woman don't really matter to me, but you do, an' that scares me plenty. I don't mean you're no witch. I just feel you got power over me, is all. Because, I guess I love you. Because I think you'd tie me to you—have my babies to do it, if I was a man. Wimmin operate that way . . ."

Osceola said more quietly than before, "But you are a woman too . . . you know what we do . . ."

Daly cut her off, ". . . Aw, baby, you know what I mean."

Osceola: "I know what you say."

Daly turned, kissing Osceola's hand; avoiding a touch of any other kind.

"I got to go. Got to be by myself for a while. I'll call you. OK?"

Osceola announced, eyes on Daly's feet, "Do you know you've hurt me?"

Her voice was pinched and tiny.

Daly nodded and pushed past her out of the door.

Osceola listened until Daly's feet had touched the bottom step and she had opened and shut the creaky front door. She pulled the wooden shade at her kitchen window all the way down; making the house dark. She sunk into her bed, pulling the covers over her head. Osceola lay there, foolishly waiting to smother.

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Daly holed up in the hall of her building. She pressed her head against the cool, dirty concrete wall and sobbed. Her cries brought people to their front doors. They dared not approach her or reach out. They closed their doors on her pain. She stayed there until dark—now silent—not wanting to look up, lest any spectator be left. She crawled up the stairs on her hands and knees. And into her apartment. Once inside, she took the wine bottle from the shelf and turned it up to her mouth; but not drinking. Instead, she poured the liquid over her head, letting it spill down her body. When the bottle was empty, Daly blew notes into it, like she had done countless times as a little girl. She imagined herself to be a player in a jazz band: well-known and liked, with a moustache and a fine talent. She tried to see the beautiful wimmin who would find her interesting and offer their favors.

But the fantasy wouldn't work this time.

She stood up from the floor and walked to the mirror on the wall. She saw her blood-red eyes and wine-soaked body inside the glass. She saw dawn rising over her left shoulder.

It was the first time Daly had been out in the world without the stranger's face. It was the first time she had come near to showing all of her own.

## THE LOPRESTO TRAVELING MAGIC SHOW

The summer seemed to fade behind the train as the city landscape shrunk to trees and lawns and long, flat beaches. That trainride, that trainride every summer to Aunt Terry's, seemed to let me shrug the heat off my body, shake my brothers and sisters like itchy drops of sweat from my hair, until I could whirl in my head in the new free space I found away from home.

Not that Aunt Terry's trailer was palatial. With her and me and Molly bumping around in the twelve-foot by fifty-two-foot tin box, as they called it, there was probably less room than at home. But it was different. Maybe because I didn't have to weave through the living room set. Or because Terry and Molly didn't have a TV to bump into or fancy ceramic figures dancing on tiny tables. Nothing was breakable there or so sacred you couldn't knock it over. Even their beers were always replaceable, and the poor smooth rug was soaked in them so regularly they called it their beer-rug.

It just *felt* bigger at Aunt Terry's when I woke in the morning and squeezed my way in and out of the bathroom, walked the few steps to the front door of the trailer and stepped down, barefoot, to the damp brown ground. There were no elevators or long flights of stairs to the earth there. Just a small child's step out and down. Aunt Terry let me play alone outside in my pajamas even when I was very young, because she and Molly needed to sleep off the night before in the only closed room there, and knew I valued my visits with them too much to wander into trouble.

I'd sit for a long while on a milk crate just outside the door, watching the strange neighborhood wake up and start its day. The trailer across from Aunt Terry's was a mirror reflection of hers except for the little entranceway the neighbors had built on their door to keep the heat inside in winter. With time the tiny space it created filled with such a jumble of brooms and tools and boots and slickers that I was glad I didn't have to find my way through it quietly in the mornings. But inside, where I had once been, the walls were covered with imitation wood paneling and the furniture fit like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. The old couple who lived there were handier than Aunt Terry and Molly, and you could tell they spent almost no time at Gaffney's, the restaurant and bar next door to the trailer park, which so many residents treated like an extension of their tiny living rooms.

Despite the similarity of the trailers, their proximity, and their numbers, the scene was so different from the city where I lived, I used to just watch them all sit there without a pattern and I'd try to make some sense of their placement. At home the apartment buildings lined the blocks side by side, up the street and down the street. At Aunt Terry's some trailers were side by side, some end to end, some jammed between others so that only an end

stuck in or peeked out, and a few stood in the middle of an invisible circle which could almost be called a yard and was certainly used as one. When I got older, Janis Joplin's voice would always bring back to me that early-morning scene of ragged community living when she sang, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." Not because Aunt Terry's trailer park was as desolate a place as it looked. Simply because it and its residents' lives had been stripped of the excesses of living. Here there were no frills, no money thrown about, no airs or unnecessary clutter. The ground bred no grass because it was too well used; the homes carried spots of rust and old old paint because there was not the money to fix those things until absolutely necessary. There were no patios or gardens because leisure there was either nonexistent or spent in the easier comfort of Gaffney's. Yet it was the most comfortable and unthreatening place I have ever been, and I wish now as I did then that Twelve Elms Trailer Park could have been my home more than two weeks a year.

Eventually Molly would come to the trailer door and call me back from whichever corner I'd strayed into. Sometimes I'd be visiting with one of the many cats or dogs of the park; sometimes I'd get all the way over to the miniature-golf course and driving range out back that was run by the park's owner. On a weekend morning her call might have found me halfway out the driving range, gingerly still barefoot on that huge expanse of grass, my pajamas wet from rolling in the dew. Once back at the trailer, there was Aunt Molly's breakfast for the three of us. They always had lemons, and before eating breakfast Aunt Terry would cut one in quarters and bite into its pulp, shaking her head with the rind against her lips like a sunny yellow smile, eyes tearing above it. "When you're old enough to get hung over, Princess," as she called me, "don't forget your Aunt Terry's cure. If you survive the shock, you're ready for a new day!" Then she'd lift her juice mug and toast Molly silently.

Aunt Terry was quite a woman. I sensed it then and I know it now. Those breakfast feasts were a statement: Whatever happened to her the night before, she was always very alive come daylight. Of course, I had not shared the night life they led until that trip. I knew they went over to Gaffney's where Molly was a cook. I knew they drank every night as much as my parents drank in a year. I knew they had friends my father would not approve. My parents did not even know that Molly worked nights in a bar or that Aunt Terry had been through several jobs since I'd begun visiting. One of her problems was that she wanted at least one month off every summer. And she took it. "Two weeks for my Princess," she'd say, "and two for old Mol'." It seemed like a good system to me because I had exclusive rights to Aunt Terry most of the day and did not have to feel bad about Molly because her two weeks were coming. Besides, though Molly worked long steady hours at Gaffney's, she worked them at night when Aunt Terry would be there with all their friends.

My parents thought Aunt Terry was the cook and that she worked days in a restaurant that closed down two weeks each summer. They believed that the way the whole family believed anything about Aunt Terry since she left home. I knew that Nonno LoPresto, my father's and Aunt Terry's father, had kicked her out for some reason, but no one ever talked about it. When Aunt Terry, on a Christmas visit, first asked if they'd like to send one of their kids,

me for instance, up to see her that summer, my parents jumped at the idea. To get one kid out of that apartment for almost nothing they would have forgotten anything they'd ever heard about Aunt Terry anyway. Especially since they couldn't believe there was anything "wrong" with someone in their family.

I was seven the first year and twelve the year it all happened, so I knew, or thought I knew, everything and everyone up there pretty well. Terry LoPresto was a feisty, short, skinny Italian daughter who the family said should have been a son. She had muscles on her upper arms, and I used to compare mine to hers at the breakfast table with Molly laughing at us and calling us both juvenile delinquents from the Bronx. And I felt as if we were just that, because Aunt Terry acted so young. "Never took any responsibility," my mother said about her when Nonno LoPresto died, and maybe she was right, or maybe Aunt Terry only took the responsibilities she was needed for. In either case her forty-three years had left her looking a lot more than ten years younger than her brother, my poor pale shrunken father who, if he had a muscle, sure never let us see it. It was just his choice in life, I know, to get married and strap himself down to supporting six kids on a clerk's salary. It must have shrunken his soul, too, because that showed no resemblance to Aunt Terry's either. She had an energetic exuberance about her that made her leap around like she was my age. Her tight wavy hair was as short as she could get it, and her clothes, dungarees or chinos with flannel shirts or sweat-shirts, required as little care as her hair. She worked hard every year, most of the year, at whatever job she could get. One of my favorite years she worked for the lumber store and got wood and materials free to make a lean-to next to the trailer. She waited until I came up to build it, and that was practically all we did those two weeks. I was nine and had never been prouder in my life than when we finished that little storage shed. Aunt Terry called it my room and said she was going to build a special bed in it so they could rent it out to me when I grew up. I knew it wasn't big enough, but it was my dreamhouse all the next year back in the city.

Molly was what people call the motherly type. She was short like Terry and had short grey hair, but hers was straight and cut a little longer so it looked soft and the wind would muss it up. She wore pants all the time, too, but they were different, more like ladies' pants in dark greens and navy blues. She mostly seemed to let Aunt Terry take the initiative in things, but hers was the restraining hand when Aunt Terry started to get into fights and the comforting hand when one of us was sick. And it was Molly who had initiated my visits. She was the one who believed in keeping up family ties and saw that Aunt Terry had something to give my father's children no one else in the family could offer.

Over the years I met their small, odd circle of friends. Big slow Bozo told stories of his several years in traveling circuses but was a sad person, resigned to the decreased demand for clowns who "wasn't the best." Bozo's best friend was Ed, his next-door neighbor. Ed was waiting for his wife to come back and had been waiting since I met him. He introduced visitors in his trailer to a gold-framed picture of a teased-haired, bleached-blond woman in a white angora sweater as if it were his wife in person. Bozo and Ed were both lucky

enough to work for the town steadily and could only complain that they had to get up too early in the morning. They were on the sanitation crew and bragged of making the town fit to live in.

Minnie and Lester were a retired couple who were "just full of it," as Molly described them. He was the practical joker of the group and big Minnie was the flirt. They always had jokes and cracks to make about everything and kept the others laughing. The whole group generally gathered, with a few drifters, at Gaffney's every night to down pitchers of beer.

One of my favorite memories must have happened the first year I was up there because I remember Aunt Terry piggy-backing me into the restaurant in my pajamas to quickly peck the cheeks of the whole gang before being put to sleep in the trailer. And I remember falling asleep, even alone in the dark as I was, full of a feeling of warmth and security as I pictured them in my mind. They were all in a booth, squeezed together, smiling and laughing, spilling and shouting, smoking and pleased as they could be that this little child was theirs to love for two weeks. I can still see the wooden booth, dark and carved with initials, the table between them overflowing with ashtrays and glasses and empty pitchers. They were against an inside wall where the brightest light came from a tiny lamp hung under a dim shade. The shade was decorated with horses jumping over hedges and red-suited men riding the horses. It all gave my seven-year-old mind a sense of adventure and excitement and specialness and danger like a fairy tale.

So each summer I left the Bronx with anxiety and anticipation all squeezed together in my stomach. This particular summer was worse because as I stepped on the train I knew I'd gotten my period for the third time in my life. I found my seat and sat frozen until the train moved out of the station. Then I ran to the bathroom and, over Harlem, threw up what seemed the sum of all that past horrible year of puberty. I raised my head briefly and saw the long narrow streets of the ghetto, the ripped-out walls, the half-smashed windows, the boys roaming in packs, and was sick again. All that year I had felt prey to the terrors of the city. Vulnerable now to men, I had feared them. Unable to compete with those girls on my block who had an aptitude for dressing, walking, and talking correctly, I had feared their remarks and my inadequacy, and did not understand why I should be like them. And when my period had come, I was ashamed. My closest companion that year was the tree outside my window which, stunted, still survived to live surrounded by trash cans in our alleyway. In the summer the smell of garbage rose to our sixth-floor windows and smelled as it must have smelled to my tree all the time. Our only release, mine and the tree's, came on trash days when still it was torture to be awakened at 4 a.m. to hear the dragging, scraping sounds of trash collection and the rough heavy voices of the men who threw the cans back at the tree as if with a vengeance.

A scorned garbage tree, I felt, the second girl after three boys. My femaleness was not special as it had been for my older sister, but had become familiar enough for my brothers to taunt me about it. That older sister, one of the popular girls, scorned my embarrassment and wore her femininity like a flag. For me, the last three months had been colored by hot painful cramps and shame. Now here I was, the only one on the train having to face this ordeal, alone and with no preparation.

Like my little garbage tree though, I adapted, made what repairs I could, and skulked back to my window seat to be lulled, finally, into the familiar release that came to me every year on the train. I was glad to see poor bow-legged Lester at the station. He was beaming up at me through a window. He had no teeth and his shrunken cheeks were covered with short white bristles. Even on that hot summer day he wore the navy-blue watch cap I'd never seen him without, but Minnie had pressed his black chinos until they were shiny, and his boney wrists were a welcome support as I saw them emerge from his sweatshirt to lift me, suitcase and all, off the steps almost before the train could stop. Lester drove a cab to supplement his Social Security and sped me in it as I sat importantly in the front seat, gaining a little confidence, to Twelve Elms. He tried to give me the year's news in the ten-minute ride along the blessedly familiar Post Road, and by the time we arrived I didn't even cry when I confessed to Molly what my needs were. She smiled and nodded and sent me into their tiny bedroom to change while she rustled through her things to find the right supplies. Then we sat at the pull-down kitchen table, and Molly told me what she had gone through at my age. When Aunt Terry arrived after shopping, I was laughing and telling Molly how I wished I could transplant my garbage tree to Twelve Elms where I knew it could grow better.

Aunt Terry gave me an affectionate punch in the arm and yelled for lunch. Molly got up to fix it while Aunt Terry and I walked around the park, Aunt Terry showing me all the small changes since last year, the new important people, the new drifters. We got to the edge of Twelve Elms and Aunt Terry pointed to some activity at the far end of the driving range.

"Carnival coming in," she told me.

"Here?" I asked, excited.

"Sure is. That's why we changed the week you were coming, to give you a surprise. The owner's having trouble making anything off of this golf thing, so he's rent it out to the church people. Going to be a big one, too, by the looks of it. Bozo's taking his vacation now. Going to be a clown the whole weekend."

I was too excited about it all to answer, but Aunt Terry looked over at me, then leaned over and gave me a hug, a rare thing for her to do. I could feel she was as excited as me. A carnival in our own back yard!

When the trucks began sporadically arriving that night, I could hear as I writhed on my cot, fighting the cramps as Molly had told me to, by relaxing. Images of the city came to me in my sleep, but I woke and was comforted in the knowledge that the trucks brought carnival people, not garbage men. I imagined people pitching tents, setting up a gypsylike camp, rolling the rides into place. I learned better the next morning when I ran to the driving range and saw not dozens, but maybe five or six dumb, unadorned tractor trailers sleeping on the field.

By early Thursday morning, though, the driving range looked different. The tractor trailers had been driven into a circle, as in a wagon train, and their cabs driven off to rest on another part of the range. The circle was open on one end where an admission booth had been half-assembled. Cautiously, remembering stories of circus-gypsy kidnappings, I walked between two of the trailers and stood just inside the circle. Overnight, a merry-go-round and

other rides had appeared in the center of the circle, and as I stood silent and observant their stillness revealed them to me. I could see the machinery by which they ran and the grease and stains of their traveling and their careless use. I saw those vehicles of adventure as if they were naked, out of costume, without the motion which gave them their magic. Around them the trailers stood, the counters built into their sides closed, their seams suggesting the hawkers who would later lean across them, loudly seducing the crowds to their games and shabby prizes.

When I turned back to the trailer park, it looked like another sleeping carnival: shoddy, used-looking, sad and disappointing. The sun broke out and lit up two pots of red tulips outside a trailer, and I realized it was a cloudy day. I wondered if the carnival could start if it rained. I decided it did not matter anyway and walked through the trailers feeling very alone and sad. I had lost something I'd always had. In a book I knew it would be called growing pains, but it did not satisfy me to define my feelings. I wanted everything to be exciting again. I wished I was back in the Bronx with my tree, dreaming of a better place. I wished there were tulips everywhere. I wished the gypsies *would* come and take me. Then, kicking a cinderblock planter painted a garish purple, I reminded myself there were no gypsies either. Just workmen I could by now hear revving trucks and slamming things behind me.

As I approached Aunt Terry's trailer, she was just stepping down from the door, pulling a long black robe around her shoulder. She saw me and grinned shyly, "I got picked."

"For what?"

"To be the vampire!" she answered, swinging the robe across her face and leaping at me.

I couldn't help but laugh through my depression and asked, "What vampire?"

"I'm only kidding, Princess. They want a magician, the people who are planning this. And theirs disappeared. I don't blame him. I wish I knew how," she sighed.

"But you can't be a magician," I protested, remembering the few awkward tricks Aunt Terry had amused me with on rainy days. "You can't do any real tricks."

"That's what *I* said, Princess. But no. Your Aunt Terry is the sucker."

We both sat on milkcrates gazing toward the carnival site. It did not look as stark from that distance, with the ferris wheel poking over the trucks and another ride's rockets looking poised to take off. "Besides," Aunt Terry explained, "they told me it's not *what* you do so much as *how* you do it. Look." She pulled a deck of cards out of her shirt pocket as she talked about how she had been railroaded into the job and how she had been practicing a few tricks that she'd learned a long time ago from an old friend when she'd lived around the country before she'd met Molly. As she talked I realized, first, that I knew nothing of Aunt Terry's life before Molly except family stories—and not many of them—and, second, that she had performed two card tricks in front of me before I even noticed.

"That's magic!" I said and then got embarrassed as she winked at me. "I mean, I know it's supposed to be, but you really did it!"

"That's why I got picked. Cause I can make it look like magic. I don't

know how, but that's really the only thing I ever learned to do good enough I was proud of it. Not that I can make money at it, but I can do it."

"I bet you *could* make money. I bet you're really good," I remember saying in my childish faith that Aunt Terry could do anything.

"Maybe, but the only way they let ladies practice magic is in a long-sleeved gown with gobs of makeup. That's what Dusty was like—my friend who taught me what I know. But she played second to a man magician and that's as far as she could go. Not for me, Princess."

Of course I had never really thought of magic or any other profession as realistically as Aunt Terry had, so I accepted what she said without too much thought while wondering about the romantic figure of Dusty and how Aunt Terry had ever met someone like that. It wasn't until we'd gone in for the early breakfast Molly had prepared for the practice session (which would last off and on until Saturday with hardly a beer in between) that I realized my sadness and disillusionment had disappeared: I was again looking forward to the Carnival.

Now when I think back to that Saturday, it's all a whirl of activities I can hardly separate. Molly and Ed and Lester and I had made a little platform for Aunt Terry with a draped table and a sign that read "The LoPresto Traveling Magic Show" which we thought was very clever. Aunt Terry was nervous, crumpling empty pack after pack of those short Pall Malls she loved until Molly made her have a drink over Aunt Terry's protests that it would ruin her reflexes. There was an excited spirit of cooperation among everyone in the group except Bozo, who kept pulling people out to help him rehearse his clowning.

We'd all been to the carnival as customers Thursday and Friday nights when Aunt Terry and Bozo were not performing, so we'd had our fill of cotton candy and rides. Molly and I were free Saturday and Sunday to run back and forth between Aunt Terry and the wandering clowns (Ed and Lester had finally volunteered to clown with Bozo) and our trailer. We carried cold drinks and bandaids and supplies for Minnie to repair makeup when the heat of the day rolled it off the men's faces. Aunt Terry needed very little attention and kept playing magician to crowd after crowd of kids and adults. She just stood there in her cape, her black jeans, a shiny red shirt we'd found at Goodwill, and, of course, a tall black hat that fit perfectly over her short hair. As I remember her now, she was a perfect magician. She seemed tall and imposing over all those little kids' heads, composed and graceful on her little stage. Even the show she did Saturday night was a success, despite the older, rougher crowd. There was just something about her, I guess you'd call it her own magic, that kept them fascinated. Even when one particularly obnoxious man demanded a rabbit out of a hat, she pulled it off with Lester supplying a stuffed rabbit he'd won for Minnie at one of the prize booths. The crowd roared, and Aunt Terry, for those two days and forever after in my mind, became a real magician.

When it was all over Sunday night, the bar was already closed so everyone piled into Aunt Terry and Molly's trailer. They were so exhausted one beer was all most of them could down to celebrate the show, and the next day was spent resting, slowly falling from the weekend high of activity. We got

a little restless toward the end of the day, so Aunt Terry decided to take me and Molly to the movies to thank us for our assistance. She borrowed Ed's old Bonneville so we could go to the drive-in where a Katherine Hepburn show was playing. Aunt Terry was so impressed with Katherine Hepburn she did not pay any attention to which movie we were seeing; it wasn't until we got there that we learned it would be "Suddenly Last Summer." It was the first Tennessee Williams film I had ever seen, and I sat transfixed by the power of the story and the acting and the more painful scenes. I did look away finally so as not to see the sand alive with baby turtles and their destruction by hungry creatures otherwise so innocent and beautiful. I sat between Molly and Aunt Terry for most of it and noticed their frequent looks over my head, but I didn't understand so much of the film I knew they needn't worry that they had been wrong to take me.

As we drove out of the theatre lot on our way to take Molly to work at Gaffney's, I climbed into the back seat. I felt unsettled, as if I was about to get my period again. The movie had really upset me. I didn't feel like crying, but I couldn't talk about it either. I felt as if I were on the edge of something, as if Tennessee Williams had been speaking to me, as if he'd wanted to tell me something that had to do with all the puzzling I was doing. Cramps; the garbage men hurting my helpless tree; growing pains; the carnival's secret machinery; excitement; Aunt Terry, the handsome magician; fear; the handsome man in the film—so many images hurtling around the small space of my mind.

"That was a pretty weird movie, huh Princess?" Aunt Terry finally asked over the front seat.

I must have mumbled something and I saw Aunt Terry glance again at Molly. "I just don't understand!" I wanted to yell as I worked hard to figure it out. I thought it might be the cannibalism that was upsetting me, but I knew it wasn't just that. It had something to do with the handsome man who was sometimes not like a man—at least, not like Bozo or my father. I remember feeling the sensuality of the film, the sexuality surrounding the beautiful, magical figure. It was wrong, something that he was doing was wrong. More wrong than the murderous little boys or the birds. But he was beautiful. The boys just wanted part of that beauty. No, they hated it, wanted to destroy it. I didn't hate it. I never wanted him hurt. I wished I could erase that destructive scene. And the scene with the turtles. Oh, what if the children had turned on Aunt Terry, I thought tiredly as I drifted into fantasy in the back seat. I remember shuddering as the cool of the night came in through the windows. Briefly, I strayed into a more comforting vision of Molly rocking me while I cried.

"Listen, after that, Princess, I think maybe you don't want to be alone. What do you think, Mol? Want to take the kid to work?"

I came back to the world quickly and sat up straight. Scared, but hoping Molly would think it was a good idea. "Sure," she answered. "Let's all go tonight. It won't be busy on a Monday."

"We'll sit near the kitchen, Princess. If a cop chances by, you scoot in and be hanging around Mol. Okay by you?"

"Yes!" I answered enthusiastically.

"But don't you tell your father or that will be the end of your summer camp."

"I don't tell him nothing," I answered truthfully.

The scene as we arrived at the bar will be with me forever, like the night I was carried over in my pajamas. Minnie and Lester were at the table with Bozo and Ed. They had made a ring of the night's long-necked beer bottles and pitchers, which Aunt Terry and Molly surveyed with a look of mock awe. Ed ducked his head and smoothed his already flat, unwashed hair in embarrassment as he slid further into the booth to make room. It didn't help much, since Ed was as short as Aunt Terry and Molly and as stout as both of them together. Next to Ed was Minnie, whose red shiny face got misty at the sight of me, her "adopted daughter."

"In her cups," Lester explained, as he moved over from his side of the booth to sit next to Minnie. Minnie smiled and squeezed toward Ed. Her pink beads pulled over one of the bottles on the way. "Ooo!" she cried as the beer fell into her lap. She sat there very still, staring at the small puddle that had formed in the slack of her skirt where it hung between her heavy legs. When Lester jumped to avoid the spill, Aunt Terry hauled Minnie out of the booth as if by habit and took her off toward the bathroom, Molly in tow. "Take care of Princess, guys," Molly called. "We'll be out in a jiff."

Bozo, playing the gentleman, had risen and guided me into the booth, sliding in after me. He was huge and red-faced and smelled bad, but I associated him with the wonderful clown of the carnival and beamed at him.

"It's the little Princess, is it?" he smiled across at Ed, leaning his heavy arm across my shoulders. "Well, what do you think, Ed? Ain't she turning out grand? Who'd of thought old Terry'd have a good looker in the family?"

Ed looked embarrassed again, smoothed down his hair till it stuck out straight over both ears, and took a long gulp of beer.

"What do you mean?" Molly challenged Bozo jokingly as she returned to the table and sat next to Lester. "Nothing wrong with Terry *you* could complain about."

"Ah, only kiddin'," he answered, lowering his head and squeezing me to him. "It's just that," and he turned to look at me, his warm breath smelling garbagey, full of garlic and beer, "well, a guy like me don't spend much time with pretty young girls, you know, Princess?"

"Hey, Boz," Ed suggested as he cracked all his knuckles, "leave the poor kid alone, you're strangling her there."

"Oh, sorry, Princess," he said, and I thought he meant it, poor big guy not knowing how to play anything but rough. He slid his hand, which I remember thinking was as big as a beer pitcher, across my shoulders and onto the edge of the table. As they began to talk of other things, I felt bad that I had shuddered again like I had when I was thinking about the movie. Bozo meant no harm. The motion of the turtles writhing in the sand under the shadow of the approaching birds flashed irrationally across my mind, making me writhe. I felt overwhelmed by Bozo's big, dumb, helpless bulk leaning

over me and did not want to be sitting next to him any longer. I wanted to be stepping out of the trailer in pajamas onto the cool damp dirt in the early morning. He put his hand on my thigh, and I jumped and looked up, and there, like magic, was Aunt Terry glaring at Bozo, asking what he was doing.

"Nothing, Terry. Just keeping the kid company until you got back."

"Move it on out," Terry ordered, motioning with her head for him to get up.

"Pull up a chair, Terry. Let me stay with the Princess a little longer," he whined goodnaturedly. I just stared at Aunt Terry, scared that she didn't want Bozo there either or want him to touch me, for he was just a little drunk and too friendly. I was scared because Aunt Terry was scared too. And I was wishing I was not there, but scared to say that. Knowing somehow it would be bad for Aunt Terry if I said it or if I removed Bozo's hand.

"Get your hands off her, Bozo," Aunt Terry said quietly. And flashing again through my mind the beautiful man attacked by the children. And also flashing across my mind perfectly clearly, unsaid: Aunt Terry it's okay he's just jealous you're the magician and he's only a clown.

I have to stop here, I always have to stop here and picture the terrified, panicked little kid I was, not even knowing the source of my terror. I was perched on a precipice. Did Eve feel like that discovering sin? Does every discovery of beauty and the things that go into the making of beauty have to be accompanied by an equal exposure to ugliness? Is pain the result when we first open our eyes? I feel myself rocking even now like Aunt Terry's little Princess did as I began to feel myself falling, crazy with fear, but every sense open to the revelation I sought. I was being violated on the one side by that big paw, not knowing that was the source of my pain, and I was being summoned by a magician from the other, not knowing what she offered to me or refused for me.

And Bozo asked slowly, "Why, Terry, do you want her for yourself? Do you want her to be queer like you?"

I was paralyzed. We all were. Innocence had become malevolence. Comradery, jealousy. Stupidity, cunning. Aunt Terry looked as if a wounded beast had turned and shot her. Molly for once could not help. Ed looked back and forth between Aunt Terry and Bozo and his face showed horror. Then I sprang, it seems in retrospect, straight up, walked as hard as I could over Bozo's two huge legs, and jumped out beside Aunt Terry. Molly reached over, smiling in a strained way, and patted Bozo's arm, saying, "Always clowning, ain't you, Bozo? Can't leave a night alone without some clowning, can he, Ed?"

Ed's face relaxed, "Hey, Boz, you drink enough yet? Gloria," he yelled to the waitress, "get us another round!" His voice made us all aware that the rumble from the other tables went on, that our moment of wrath and truth could, indeed, have been a joke, had lasted no longer than a jest, could be made as insignificant as a simple magic trick.

Minnie weaved back from the bathroom. "Taking the Princess home, Ter?" Minnie asked. "God, we could get arrested for lettin' her breathe the same air as us, we're so polluted."

"Yeah. Yeah, Minnie, guess I will," Aunt Terry finally answered. "I guess it's time. If I don't come back, Mol', I'll see you at the trailer."

"Okay, Terry. Looks like I just have to help clean up tonight," Molly answered as Gloria arrived with the round, pushing between Aunt Terry and me and the table. Aunt Terry took my hand as if I was a little girl still and turned me toward the door, then suddenly pulled away from me. "Let's go, Princess," she said, pushing my shoulder roughly as she went ahead of me to lead the way.

She waited for me on the stoop outside, looking along the empty road. I pushed the door shut behind me and felt the cool, smokeless night air on my face, and I realized I had a huge relieved smile waiting in the taut muscles of my face. Aunt Terry turned away from the road and hesitated as I joined her. I put my hand in hers as we stepped off the stoop onto the hard cold ground. She looked at me with a great hurt question pulling all her features out of whack. I let that big waiting smile spill all over my face. The tension made me feel every inch of its slow spread, and I watched it spread beyond me all over my Aunt Terry's fine gay face.



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## SHELL WOMAN

The sun keeps the earth at this point unbearably hot. I am in Kanya Kumari which is located at the southernmost tip of India. After dropping my one small bag of clothes in my hotel room I will leave in search of a friend I'd made some twelve years ago. I am not sure I will recognize her after so much time has passed. I ask a small boy and girl who are selling shells in front of the hotel if they had heard of Antonia who lived over there—I pointed toward a Catholic mission. The boy understood a little English and told me to walk around a wall and kept asking "You friend?" I didn't think he knew her and so walked away from him, drowning in miserable imaginings about Antonia.

Maybe I never really met her—it was a beautiful dream, the dances with seaweed, her holding my hand and leading me across the red and black sands to her woven house. Then I became frightened. What if something happened to her? Maybe she got leprosy and is decaying in a colony or she starved to death in a famine—was she buried alive in a cyclone!

It is November 1978 and so far my travels in India have yet to show the extreme poverty I saw in 1966. Of course India had a powerful woman for prime minister and the patriarchal news media most likely destroyed her. What can be wrong when masses of starving people are now being fed? I ask myself this and bump into a squeaking pig.

I look behind me toward the ocean to a wide hilly area with grass that has been eaten by wild pigs, goats, cows and chickens that are meandering here and there as though Kanya Kumari were a large farm fenced in on three sides by ocean.

Some children are calling me from behind a rock, "Madam! Madam!" They want me to follow them. I'm hot and thirsty plus I feel silly and I think they are laughing at me—I'm the English lady I've read about in novels who is plump, wears grey slacks and after administering medication tries to convert the pagans.

A tiny little girl in a raggedy dress keeps poking her finger into the freckles on my arm. Some other children ask in the only English they know, "What is your name?" Then look confused when I tell them and ask them for their name.

We are at the village. Many little mud huts—a number of them are close together—then open space, then one here and another hut there, then a line of huts in a row. There is a well in what seems to be the center of the village—perhaps it was simply a convenient place for a well. Then, a row of huts—some hemp-spun cots with dogs that are first resting then when they see us began barking nervously. Thatch roofs rustle in the breeze. Some of the small children

around me are carrying babies. I was led to a newly built hut with whitewashed walls that nearly blinded me.

Then I saw her! I pressed my palms together in greeting. "Antonia I am so glad to see you once again," I said. She spoke in the same tone in her language. Her face! Her face! She had become fuller as I had. We did not take our eyes off of one another. She grabbed my shoulders and pulled me behind a partition where her husband was napping—he rushed out like a frightened rat would have from behind a grain bin. A crowd gathered outside the hut and on the other side of the stone partition. Antonia and I squatted together never taking our eyes from the other's face. Were her cheekbones always so high? Her lashes so long? There were new lines in her face as there are in mine. She asked me in Tamil if I want to eat. I understand and say "Illae," no. She ignores me and brings all the food she has and sits it at my feet and addresses me in the most respectful way one woman, regardless of age, can show another—she addresses me as Mother. I am so honored and wonder if I would have a way in my culture of showing the same respect for her.

Antonia sells shells that are strung as necklaces by her daughter. I work as a maid in a motel but I don't know how to explain to her. She refers to her work of selling shells as her "Business." There were baskets of shells in the corner. I ate a little of the food she gave me and drank some water from a silver tumbler.

By this time we'd moved into the main part of the hut. Antonia's sister from the next hut had a radio blaring a south Indian cinema song. I ask Antonia what happened to her other house and drew a picture of it with a stick in the dirt floor. The women pointed to a heap of grey woven leaves outside the hut. "Ah old house!" One of the children understood and when she translated, Antonia's second to eldest sister laughed. When I tried to pair the children up with relatives I found it was difficult in this village. I could have adopted a child or maybe more for the entire time I was there and never have known who the parents were.

Antonia and I were sitting next to one another in a circle of women and children. The earth floor was cool and the room was nicely ventilated. I looked outside and saw two dogs jump on a cot and stretch out. The people inside were slapping their knees and singing with the music. Antonia grabbed my chin in a powerful grip and pointed to her mouth in a way that demanded I should sing like her. When I tried everyone laughed playfully.

When it was time for Antonia to do her "Business" she balanced a basket of shells on her head as did other women and headed for the rocks at the shore. I took the basket from her head and tried to walk like the other women with my hands flying this way and that as I spoke. The basket kept slipping from my head. How did they do it? The women all patted my back as though saying "Good try!"

We comfortably positioned ourselves on the sand with our backs against the rocks. Antonia was picking lice from my hair. Her sister was picking lice from an adolescent woman's hair. I ask the young woman if she wore a half-sari, by crossing myself from shoulder to shoulder. She was wearing a long skirt and blouse. If she had already begun menstruating she would have been wearing a cross between a sari and what she had on. She flushed shyly when

I ask—the other women answered for her teasing her as they did, “Ah half-sari!” They told me she refused to wear it. Maybe she didn’t want to grow up. I didn’t either. I gestured pointing to her, then to my long pants and out beyond the ocean. “America,” I said. She nodded her head excitedly in agreement. I tried to picture her in jeans and a little tee shirt.

An older woman with yellowing hair joined us. She was coughing and mumbling to herself. This is Antonia’s eldest sister. Antonia told her sister to lay down in the sand then Antonia made circling and criss-cross gestures on her temples and across her abdomen while muttering something. I thought eldest sister must have TB. I have never known anyone with TB so how can I know for sure?

The sun is nearer the water. Off in one direction is a Catholic church in another direction is a Hindu temple and in front of that is a Gandhi memorial building. Out on a rock in the ocean is a recently built temple. People came from all over the world to see it. Tourist buses were lined up in a market place. Boats at a dock were crowded with people going and returning from the rock temple. The two small children from the hotel when I first arrived stood in front of me. The little girl has dimples like Shirley Temple. They are both holding shell necklaces in their hands. Although they are exactly like the ones the adults sell, the children sell them for much less.

Tourists are waiting huddled on the rocks for the sun to set. I am watching Antonia and the others selling their shells. Some people buy them and others push the shell people rudely away. I sit far away. The sun sinks into the ocean and is swallowed up by waves. Everyone is standing and applauding. What would happen if the sun never set, I thought, wiping the perspiration from my forehead—I stood and applauded.

The next morning I brought saris for Antonia and her daughters and sisters. Then I brought her to my hotel room and ask her to stay with me until I leave. I do this by pointing to the floor then the two beds and then to her and me. She agrees and we put the mattresses on the floor next to one another.

In a while we are bathing. She fills a bucket with water and pours a dipper of water over me then over her. She’s upset because I have pubic hair and runs her hand straight across my pubic bone and says in English “Blade.” I know as many words in Tamil as she does in English. Our communication must come from other sources than the spoken word. She has never gone to school and cannot write her name.

When we dress she says again “Blade” and disappears into the night. I think she said she was coming back but I don’t know. I can hear the people in the kitchen banging pots and talking loudly and rapidly. A young couple across the hall are arguing and a baby is crying somewhere.

She was disgusted because I have pubic hair. Outside my window the quarter moon is lighting a line of yellow across the water. Little lizards that make a clicking noise crawl up and down the walls.

“Madam! Madam!” It’s Antonia calling me from the window. She has brought a blade so I undress again.

I am standing with my legs apart and she is bending down and I can hear the blade scratching the hair. I am *very* nervous—she pats me on the leg a few times to make me relax.

After all my body hair from my neck down has been removed, we sit on a quilt on the mattresses. With pen and paper I am showing her how many years old I am. She knows how to count to five in English. Two rupees madam four rupees sir (for a string of shells). She also knows the word christmas. I draw straight lines—one christmas, two christmases—until I arrive at thirty-five christmases—she is also thirty-five christmases old. I learned many things from her those few sunrises we had together. Her mother died when she was very small; before she died she had a hex sign tattooed on Antonia's arm. She remembered it hurt. Her first child died as an infant. Her son was twelve and her daughter eighteen. She did not like carbonated water and was getting bored with the shell-selling business. When she had her period she tied her petticoat up between her legs under her sari.

She gave me something to chew—betel nut leaf and tobacco dipped in something. Minutes after chewing she twirled her finger over her head and rolled her eyes—"Oh y-e-a-h!" I realized I was floating. She was laughing. I flew across the mattress to check her teeth. They were perfect except for the red stains from the betel nut. Although she was full build there was not an ounce of flabby tissue on her. She was the color of warm chocolate milk on a cool evening and as sweet as coconut oil and I drank her up.

Sometime during the night she wrapped her arms around my head and whispered "sister sister!" in my ear. She had chosen me as her sister. We were twins sharing the same womb and our life experience only began then.

There was a knock at the door. A turbaned man brought our breakfast—scrambled eggs, toast, rice, tea for her, coffee for me. We had both bathed before eating. I opened the curtain and we sat on chairs at a table under the window watching the seagulls circling over foamy breakers. We giggled over silly things—the fork neither of us used, the sari that I didn't wrap properly. Then she taught me what two turbans together was in Tamil. Another word for two saris together. As for a sari and a turban I had to say the word in a near whisper several times and she would bite her lip and blush. Two turbans and two saris was something she didn't seem to mind my repeating out loud. So I surmise from this (mind you this is my own assumption) a sari and a turban together is a dirty word.

Since the written word and the spoken were limited in our communicating I was only able to create an ancient Matriarchal village in my imagination where Antonia and I must first have met each other.

The few sunrises with Antonia went by much too quickly. During our time together we went to the market place, I learned to clean my teeth with my fingers, we took a boat ride to the rock temple and took a bus to the nearest town and made friends with a woman who only spoke Hindi and was on vacation and had twelve children in northern India. We collected sea shells from the rocks and shared so many things that people share when they understand that real wealth cannot be hoarded.

## THE BLUE COAT

None of the students at school knew my father had died. I didn't tell anyone. My teacher, Mr. Nichols, knew because my mother had told him. But he never talked about it. I didn't want to talk to anyone at school about it. Even my mother's family didn't talk to me about it. American are embarrassed by grief. I only got one letter, from a cousin's grandmother in New Orleans, saying how sorry she was at the news. I kept that letter very carefully in my top dresser drawer, under my socks. Very quiet, I carried the pain like a lead weight in my chest all the time. On any blank piece of paper, I would write, "My father is dead. My father is dead. My father is dead," once even writing it on the roll of toilet paper in the bathroom.

The sight of my mother's new-born baby, my half-brother born three days before Father died, gave me relief. He was a beautiful gurgling baby, fat and blond, and watching him, taking care of him, made me feel better. When he was born, I had sent a telegram to my sisters back in Argentina, "Mother had a boy. Both fine." Sometimes I wondered if Father had opened the telegram and it upset him so he had the accident.

The days were very gray: January in New York. I would walk to school every morning ten blocks downtown beneath the tracks of the Third Avenue El, bums staggering drunk on the sidewalks or curled up helpless in doorways, their feet bare, scabbed, calloused a deep yellow.

Mr. Nichols taught the seventh and eighth grades in one classroom and he decided I would do both in one year and graduate that June. It was a "progressive" school I went to, so that I could do that. I was there on a scholarship. Most of the students were Jewish and their parents Leftists and some of the teachers even belonged to the Communist Party. There was an uproar later when the school was investigated by Senator Joe McCarthy. A Black girl named Leslie and I were the only Christians in the class. Being so outnumbered reinforced my faith so that I even wore a crucifix to school.

I sat next to a boy named Earl who had huge feet. He liked me and always asked me to dance when we had square dancing. I had shed my jeans and wore skirts to school all the time and for square dancing I would wear full ones with petticoats. Many of the boys liked me. But Earl was the one to ask me on my first date. His family gave a picnic for the class out at their country place and he asked me to stay later and go to the movies with him. We went to see "The Thing," about a monster, and sat in a deserted theatre in Leonia, New Jersey, side by side, rigid and silent with shyness.

After semester break, in February of 1952, there was a new girl in the class. Her name was Sally. She was shingly pretty, with long curly dark hair and lively brown eyes. She took ballet lessons and bounced when she walked,

so that her hair, too, bounced up and down on her back. At first we stayed away from each other, watching each other. She sat next to the Black girl in the class, Leslie, and became best friends with Leslie, who had been my best friend. Once, when everyone else was out of the room I saw a note on her desk between her and Leslie about me, and I read it. On the note, Sally asked, "What is Calvert like?" And Leslie answered, "Calvert's a flirt, but she's more of a boy." That hurt me, because I had stopped wearing pants and given up my tomboy ways except during sports. I was captain of the softball team when we played by the East River.

Sally came from Hollywood, California, where her father was a movie producer. But her parents were divorced and she had just come from spending a year in Europe with her mother and stepfather. Now she lived with them on Central Park West. I learned all that listening to her talk with the other girls when we would walk up and down by the East River near the playgrounds. We didn't talk to each other directly.

I felt close to her because her parents were divorced, like mine, and because she knew Italy and France, knew more than New York or the repetitious landscapes of America with its sterile Main Streets and its little uniform towns, the way I did, coming from Argentina. I felt we shared knowledge of other ways to live, more pleasing, Latin ways.

I had learned that being "Spanish" or Puerto Rican in New York was looked down on, the way Negroes and Mexican migrant workers were looked down on in the South. My grandfather had had some Mexican field hands on his plantation in Mississippi, and they were treated as badly as the Negroes and looked as ragged and had the same burning hurt look in their black eyes. I didn't want Sally to look down on me. I wanted her to know I was white, as white as any European, so whenever the conversation veered anywhere relevant, I would explain how most Puerto Ricans were a mixture of Spanish and Indian, that the Spanish were white Europeans (I had found most Americans so ignorant of geography that some thought Argentina was near Albania) who had crossed the Atlantic. I drew a map in the dirt once to get that across. And I would tell the girls how my father's family was of pure Spanish descent, and how my mother was of English descent, so that there could be no question of my whiteness. Of course, I knew that by not being Jewish I was one up on Sally in religious pecking orders. I had learned that already, back in Argentina, which was drenched in anti-Semitism and its own brand of racism. The signals were confusing, but one thing was clear to me by thirteen: the only really correct thing to be in the U.S.A. was a White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant, preferably Episcopalian. That's what my mother was. But I wasn't.

At Recess time a bus would take us to the East River playgrounds. If we didn't play sports, we would walk up and down by the East River, six girls abreast, another girl or two always between Sally and me. There were four other girls in the class but the boys really only liked Sally and me. They would tease Sally on the bus rides back to school from the playground, pull her long hair and tell her it was like Brillo.

The boys expected that Sally and I would dislike each other and be jealous of each other over them. But one day Mr. Nichols asked us all to write

down on a piece of paper who we liked best in the class and would like to sit next to. I wrote down Sally. After he collected all the answers, Mr. Nichols read the results of his poll aloud. And it turned out that Sally had written my name. I was speechless and shy with delight. We moved the two blue tables that were our desks together. From then on we were inseparable.

Sally wore a blue wool coat. The coat racks were outside our schoolroom, in the hall. Every morning when I came to school, I would check to see if her coat were there. All life would quicken for me at the glad sight of that blue coat, but if it weren't there, my heart sank and the day without her was long and pointless.

Sally was fascinated by how much I read. I was reading *Anna Karenina* that spring, and every morning she would ask me how many pages I had progressed. In a way, I didn't like that, because it made me self-conscious about my reading, conscious every time I turned a page. But I liked her admiration. She was very bright and soon Mr. Nichols had her, too, doing seventh and eighth grades together, so that she would also graduate that June.

We sat side by side in the bright classroom all day, doing our work. Outside the windows we could see the spire of St. Mark's in the Bowery and the old churchyard. I painted that view in Art class and a teacher from another class saw it and wanted to buy it. I sold it to her for fifteen dollars. I was enormously proud. But I wasn't at all sure I wanted to become a painter. Sally and I would talk about what we would be. She took ballet lessons and her father was a Hollywood producer. He had something to do with "Singin' in the Rain." Her stepfather was an actor, so dance or theatre or movies were in her background and were all possibilities for her. She also played the piano. Whatever we would become, we thought it would be something artistic.

After school, at home, my mind would be flooded with thoughts of Sally, so that I began to write about her in my diary: "there are so many things that I want to say to her, but I can't seem to be able to say anything. She probably thinks I'm very dull and uninteresting .... Yet I like Sally terribly, perhaps just for that quality. We have the effect of making the other pick carefully for thoughts to speak out."

We went through every school day that spring side by side: to sing in chorus, down to the basement for lunch, to Art, everywhere. And we began to notice two boys who were also inseparable. But we noticed that they sometimes held hands. We knew there was something wrong about that. Sally would prod me with her elbow during Chorus and whisper, "Look at them, they're holding hands again." There was something about them that made us uneasy with each other. The two boys weren't "sissies." There was no word for whatever it was that was wrong, no real concept.

That spring the class took a trip to the country for a few days. We left by bus, all of us excited and talking away so loudly that Mr. Nichols kept clapping his hands to demand quiet. For some reason, Sally and I didn't sit side by side, but one behind the other. She turned to me, talking, her brown eyes alight, and I had my bare arms stretched out on her seat ahead of me. As she talked, she stroked my arms for a while with her hand. As I sat there,

looking at her, the blood rushed to my head and I felt my face all hot and red. It was awkward. I didn't know why I was so embarrassed, and we went on talking quickly to cover it all up and forget it.

It was beautiful in the country, tender spring leaves on the trees upstate. It was now May, so all the landscape was a light new green. We stayed at a farmhouse big enough to put up all fourteen students plus Mr. Nichols and the driver. Sally and I slept in a small attic bedroom, along with Leslie, in three separate beds all in a row.

Sally and I both loved the country so that I told her about my grandparents' farm in Virginia, "Lower Bremono," and invited her to come down there for a while with me. I would write my grandmother for permission. Sally said she'd love to come. It became my dream, my obsession, for Sally to go to "Lower Bremono" with me, and I had visions of us riding horseback there together and swimming in the lake.

When we got back to the city, I broached the question of Sally's going to "Lower Bremono" to my mother. She was pessimistic, didn't think my grandmother would say yes. That night I wrote down in my diary, "Mother is jealous of Sally."

That spring I would make my First Communion in the Roman Catholic Church. My mother had become a devout Episcopalian in the last few years and I usually went with her to her church, but out of love and loyalty to my dead father and my lost homeland I had decided that I not only wanted to be called by the nickname he had called me, I also wanted to remain a Roman Catholic. It didn't matter to me that Father had never gone to Mass and was staunchly anti-clerical.

I studied the Catechism after school at a convent on Stuyvesant Square with an old nun named Sister Patrick. The convent always smelled of food cooking and I would sit there, my stomach churning with hunger, while Sister Patrick drilled me. She found me such an apt student that she put me to teaching the Catechism in Spanish to some Puerto Rican children.

The day came when I had to make my first confession. I was to receive my First Communion the next day. Sister Patrick went with me, taking me to a church in the neighborhood. She had rehearsed me in what to say: "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." Still, I was nervous. When I went into the little dark booth I could see through the screen enough to make out a fat, bloated-looking priest. I had to tell him all my sins for the thirteen years of my life: lying, how I used to steal money, books, and toys when I was little, anger, how I masturbated. At that point he spoke up and asked me for details: how often and how long I masturbated, where I did it. He had a low sensual voice. His whispering sounded obscene. It was very hard for me to talk. He disgusted me. He upset me so much that I hurried through the rest of the confession so as to leave.

Once outside I remembered some venial sins I had meant to confess. I thought I couldn't receive Holy Communion still in a sinful state, so I went to another church, confessed to another, easier priest and finally considered myself fully absolved.

The next morning we went to the convent with my mother and stepfather, taking a taxi five blocks through the pouring rain so that my white dress

wouldn't get drenched. With a whole flock of little girls much younger than I, all of us in white dresses, I received my first communion. I was terrified of biting the wafer so I waited carefully for it all to disintegrate in my mouth before swallowing it. When I got home, I wrote down in my diary: "I felt very well. I think God really came into me."

My mother, stepfather, baby half-brother, his Uruguayan nurse and I all lived in a small four-room apartment on Eighteenth Street, off Third Avenue, near Gramercy Park. We sublet it furnished, and so had to keep on the walls the paintings executed by the owner. They were all lush tropical scenes, very strong green against the pink walls. But it was sunny and airy, all the windows overlooking yards with trees and flowers. I had my own little bedroom that I loved. Sometimes I would sit and read there with my baby half-brother and my dachshund dog "Leibe" lying on my bed in the spring sunlight. But I knew that Sally's apartment was much grander so I never asked her, or anyone else from school, to come home with me.

As the end of school and graduation approached, an urgency developed in me. I wanted to see Sally all the time, after school, too. She asked me to go to her ballet class one day and I was delighted watching her, her body taut and strong, beautiful, erect. Her legs were very full and muscular, like a dancer's, unlike mine, which were skinnier. Sally would glance at me every so often, her face very serious. I knew she wanted me to be impressed, and I was. But I also knew she wasn't the best. The teacher kept correcting the way she moved her back and stomach. I suffered for Sally then.

Afterwards we went to Schrafft's with her mother and stepfather for ice cream. I was excited to meet them, to know more about her life, to be closer. Sally's mother was slender and good-looking, very direct and open, asking me about my life, interested, so I felt quite at ease and liked them both. They talked about their plans. They didn't know whether they'd move back to California. Neither Sally nor I knew where we'd be going to school next year.

I would ask Sally to do different things with me, go to see Jean Renoir's movie, "The River," and she would always accept, but then would break a lot of our dates. I knew that she had a friend named Liz who went to another school, and I thought she probably did a lot of things with her, and I was jealous.

A few days after graduation, Sally asked me to come to her house for dinner and to stay overnight. I accepted, trying to keep my joy calm and my voice from trembling on the phone. When I arrived, she showed me around the big apartment on Central Park West. She had a big bedroom with twin beds, where we would sleep. In the living room, she had her own grand piano, a Steinway. She played on it for me a while, scores from Hollywood and Broadway musicals. Then we helped her mother cook dinner in the kitchen, all talking. They told me about their life in Italy and France, about a boy who had been Sally's love there. I told them about Argentina and my cousin Raul, who had been my love.

After dinner, when we were going to sleep, we lay in bed, still talking to her mother, who sat on Sally's bed. We told her about the two boys at school

who held hands. Sally asked her, "Are they what's called homosexuals? What's wrong with them?"

"There's nothing wrong with them," her mother said. "Nothing. They'll just outgrow it in time. It's nothing to worry about," she looked very directly at Sally. Sally's eyes looked very bright and intense.

After her mother left, Sally turned off the light. We lay there in the dark. Suddenly, Sally said, "See ... it's nothing to worry about." I didn't reply. We didn't talk any further. Soon, we were both asleep.

We spent the whole next day together, going first down to our school, where all the girls in the class were supposed to meet. But no one was there, so we walked from East Eleventh Street across to Greenwich Village. Around Washington Square, we strolled in the sunlight, looking at the annual outdoor exhibition. We thought most of the paintings corny. We sat on the fountain, eating ice cream and talking about how nice it was to be exactly the same height. We were both still growing, though, so were afraid we might not stay the same. After we had coffee at "The Peacock," we dropped in on a pianist friend of my family's, then on a painter friend of Sally's family. Still, we didn't want to separate, so I asked Sally to come with me to my aunt Kitty's uptown. My aunt was rich and had a big apartment on the Upper East Side. My mother and baby half-brother were up there spending the day. We stayed there all afternoon. After Sally left, my mother and aunt said that Sally was charming. "She has a very *feminine* charm," my aunt said. "I think she's a good influence on you." I thought my aunt must be referring to the fact that all my school friends before Sally had been fellow-tomboys.

After that day together, I wrote in my diary: "As our nurse in Argentina used to say to me, when I love somebody, I kill them with love. I want to see Sally so much that I hope she's not tired of me."

I had written my grandmother long ago for permission to take Sally down to Virginia with me, but still hadn't received a reply. A week went by without our seeing each other. Finally, Sally called one day and said she could go out to Long Island with us to visit some family friends out there. They had a baby girl a little older than my half-brother. Like my family, they were very religious, and I wondered how Sally would take to them. But it turned out we all went on a picnic, so while the grown-ups talked about Evelyn Underhill, Simone Weil, and Teilhard de Chardin, Sally and I talked mostly to each other and played with the two babies in the grass. She looked so pretty to me, I watched her all the time, her sparkly eyes, the soft down on her cheeks. I told her I still hadn't heard from my grandmother. She sat there with her skirt tucked neatly under her legs, suddenly looking very somber. "We might move back to California," she said. Then we looked in each other's eyes a long time, silent. I wanted to touch her, her hand, but didn't dare.

After a while, we went for a walk in the nearby woods. As we moved along under the lush June foliage, Sally suddenly took my hand and held it firmly. "It's all right," she said. "It's nothing to worry about." We walked on together, holding hands. I could feel my heart throbbing in my throat. We said nothing more. When we got back to the picnic, we resumed playing with the babies. There were long evening shadows on the grass by then. Soon, we started off for home.

After that picnic, two weeks went by with still no word from my grandmother. Every time I called Sally, she had other plans, sometimes with Liz, and couldn't see me. One day I wrote in my diary, "I am not quite as obsessed with Sally as I have been the last few days. I believe it is healthier. I love her very much always, though."

Finally, I accepted an invitation to Massachusetts to visit family friends who had a girl my age. I had a miserable time, longing for Sally, all I could do all day to comfort myself was read Charles Morgan's *The Voyage*. Conversation seemed false and trite and the hostility between the girl, Rita, and me grew until finally we had a fight. She told me I was a boring bookworm. I told her she was boring, too, stupid and silly. Mercifully, I left the next day.

When I got home, my mother told me that Sally had called while I was in Massachusetts to say they were leaving for California. She had left the day before I got home, with her mother, stepfather, and my arch rival, her friend Liz. I was stunned, speechless.

My mother handed me my mail. There were letters from my sisters in Argentina and a letter from my grandmother. In it, she said she'd be happy to have Sally and me come down to "Lower Brema," that she was delighted I had such a good friend that I loved, the first friend I had wanted to bring down there with me, and that Sally could stay two weeks or more if she wanted. I sat on the couch in my bedroom reading the letter and tears poured slowly down my cheeks.

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## SIGNS OF BIRTH: CHANGING

The crab  
sidles slowly  
sideways  
into experience,  
overshell protecting  
soft underflesh,  
slit eyes  
concealing  
the gleam of risk.

Still, cusps and zodiacs  
are not determinant.  
The unexpected,  
unpredictable  
dolphin leaps of faith  
can be performed  
as well  
by creatures  
of the sand  
and earth.

—Peggy Kornegger

## MORE OF THE SAME

I begin this now, and here, and in pencil, largely because I have no illusions, or not many, at any rate, and certainly none having to do with timelessness or the prospect of posterity. Not I. Not possibly. I begin in pencil because not hobgoblined by consistency, foolish or otherwise, there will be things, no doubt, I will wish to erase in the interest of accuracy or of other, less noble motives. I will want to erase, no doubt, and yet, I begin. Albeit in pencil, I do, at least begin.

Listen. I am nearly thirty two. For the first two thirds of my life, I was republican and chaste. I attended church, and flossed after meals. Since then I have married and had a child and married again. Details bore me. I have abandoned flossing.

I have no illusions—or precious few. This is a document, nothing more. A document, because that is what remains when the winnowing is done, when the rhetoric is removed. There is little excitement here, no neatly plotted twists. Do not expect, therefore, to be entertained. I have been nowhere and murdered no one, but I have switched to ink; to amuse myself, I suppose.

It doesn't matter. The details of my life bore even me. Especially me. The husbands and lovers and atrocities and meals, the wounds and stitches collected randomly, at random, without sense or purpose, senselessly in fact, so that they are blurred somehow by both proximity and time. The details of my life are boring, or their repetition leaves much to be desired. They seemed important at the time, as this does not, now that my illusions are purged at last.

It was not easy. Nor is this. The risk is awful; I persevere. It scarcely matters. It matters not at all. I drive no ambulance in war. I will not be bronzed for this, (in the event that I survive,) nor will any of my comrades, sisters, we call them. Sisters. We have abandoned the brotherhood of man, and the causes of war and peace, as surely as we (I) have abandoned flossing, and we call ourselves sisters, and arm ourselves as best we can.

The decision to become a revolutionary is more painful perhaps than the reality of the trenches. There is a moment always, however brief, when one believes there is a choice, some liberty, some deliberation to be got through, some middle ground between the dilemma's horns. The illusion, again, of freedom; of choice or rational thought; of reasonable, rational commitment. I balk at torture. I prefer to live. I even abhor violence, both in theory and in practice.

Spouseless, she watched the sunset, with the ferocious concentration usually reserved for vehicular assembly and faulty plumbing. She had missed years of sunsets, weeping over meatloaves and stove top stuffing, running baths, tidy-

ing up. Just the usual. Her door was framed in metal, and the peeling stucco of the porch obscured all but sky and sun and treetops and utility poles, somehow arranged in such a way as to give the illusion of ships in port, arrived somehow without benefit of wind or sail. The mizzin mast.

Her childhood, such as it was, had been fairly evenly divided between Little Women, Bomba the Jungle Boy, and Because of the Lockwoods, the three scripts, like multiple vitamins, providing in concert all she needed to survive.

I cannot wait for the interruptions to cease in order to begin. There is no one left whom I can bludgeon; forging (hacking) my way through his-her presence, I persevere.

I was talking about interruptions.

But listen. I have seasonal changes. From the first of October until the middle of February, I am as manic as I'll ever be. The rest of the time I'm depressed, except for the month of July and the last day of school, and the first day of school and the purchase of school supplies, and as many religious holidays as I can muster. Fall and Winter, then, are my rewards for surviving the rest of the year.

How can this be but disjointed?

In the spirit of unity, in the interest of sense, you must supply the details yourself. For me, the details are without interest. Our lives are all the same, the crises, the maintenance, the intermittent anguish, the occasional rush of power, are all the same, and easy enough to supply.

I nibble the conflicts like gingerbread, fearful of discovery, but my enthusiasm is engaged elsewhere.

It is morning now, and I am nearly thirty-two. I have cats, I have a child. My principal recreation is reading. My favorite color is yellow, followed by red and rust and purple and mauve and gray. I have a fondness for dancing bears and camels and ducks and pigs, and also enjoy rabbits, though they are perhaps less interesting than one would suppose.

I have never been a whiner, nor is whining a quality I admire in others. Born and bred in stoicism, my pain and anger have frolicked silently on the head of a pin. Like numbered jokes, they are familiar; like dough rising, they resist the ultimate compression. I will not refer to them again.

Compare me to myself. I have no body here. I have always been a body. I have better things to do.

I am at my best in restaurants. When he lives with his father, I will eat in restaurants with my book. Untrammled, I will mine each nugget in the stream, and eavesdrop shamelessly. The book will be my cover.

It will be a change. A chance to see families: repeating themselves endlessly even unto the third and fourth generation.

In forty years, my family produced a rapist, a sadist, a setter of fires, a piano salesperson, a ministerial student, a father of four (and parent of none), and an agnostic feminist socialist lesbian separatist revolutionary witch. I have one brother, and I am, as I may have mentioned, almost thirty-two.

When she returned from England, she found the shower had been installed as promised, and none of her plants had died.

It is not the labels which upset me.

Fear of the marketplace. Which just about covers it. I have a friend who has to lie down in the back seat of the car to keep from screaming. Sometimes I scream on the freeway. I have another friend who screams too. Sometimes

times we scream on purpose, and sometimes it just happens when we're especially tired.

Maybe twice a day I think I can't move/go on, and I have to sit there until I can move again. He understands that now, and waits for me, and it is much easier than when he was a baby because now he can open the cans.

He will be the world's best-read capitalist. And I will be his mother.

Today I bought a radio, its antennae superfluous and phallic as a summer's day. I have yet to extend it, but the reception is excellent, nonetheless. I will listen to music of the Renaissance.

The worst rapes are the ones in which the victim is tied up. That is the first thing we tell them in self defense. We say: "Never let anybody tie you up." It is a good rule.

When she returned from England, the shower was already installed and none of her plants had died.

I must work quickly, while there is still time. Last night I sat with my new radio. I sat in my chair and held it in my lap, and it was like a miracle.

I am not foolish. I do not expect to rest. There is none here, and precious little there either, as far as I can tell. No rest. No peace. Only the medicinal agonies of regimental bliss, only the pain of early risings and takings of air: The punishment for bungled escapes, a fate next which all others pale—dragged back screaming and clapped into irons, into chronological rigidity, the imagination flayed past bearing. I am not foolish. I balk at torture. I prefer to live.

The odds were impossible, worse than ever, and still they left in droves. Taking their children with them, they sorted themselves into apartments and hotel rooms and carports and tents, jettisoning toys and clothes and appliances (major and minor) and whatever badges of respectability could not be reduced to the size of a rain bonnet or converted into ready cash, and they hesitated not at all over their choices; they had been planning this for years.

At first, no one noticed: Their husbands, least of all. A moment's irritation, a couple of Saturdays with the kids, and the men relaxed into indifference, and remarried quickly, dependent on their prey.

My cats sleep in the daytime, and protect me at night. In the daytime, I mostly protect myself.

This is all true. I want you to know that. This is not the entrails of a million fortune cookies laid end to end, this is all true.

Already, this is too long. It twitches away from me, or leaps from the arms of my chair and there is nothing I can do to stop it. I am vaguely embarrassed by all of this, as you must surely know. In the absence of detail, there is only more of the same, and I do not expect rest or justice (I am not foolish, after all), but more of the same is not a thought to cling to with anything approaching tenacity. More of the same, in short, is small comfort. More of the same. More of the same. More of the same.

Chapter Two: The Wedding Night.

Compare me to myself.

I have scars on my back from fucking in wheatfields.

I often lie without meaning to. Sometimes lying is merely (simply) a matter of completing one's sentences when one has not been sure where they were going.

My mother, who has never for a moment considered suicide, has recently taken to putting stickers on her letters. The latest says: "Do not be worried and upset...believe in God."

And there you have it.

I am nouveau poor. I have used my leisure to think and to fall apart. I oppress millions daily, just by continuing to live and eat and breathe.

My coffee is picked by children, and I have never held you, except in parting.

I am better today.

You have been warned to expect no excitement, but an occasional anecdote may not be counted amiss, and may actually serve to lighten an otherwise dismal narrative.

Listen. I could write about myself forever. Everyone does, after all. Or has. And one sees the little broken off bits and chips and shards and scraps of the author, (and what queer fancies they have after all), and over and over, and one thing at a time, one tries to get at the meaning, to make sense of it all, and there is nothing, nothing. Cruel hints only. Like innumerable clumps of nitrogen clinging to our literary roots, the connections of one individual to another are every bit as difficult to fathom as anything else.

One reads, and the mind races ahead, grasping at straws and rearranging them, forming patterns which will inevitably be destroyed before the bottom of the page. Nothing sits still for a moment. There is always the past to be considered, and the future, and the mind races on ahead, or rumbles along behind, and the book is laid aside in the excitement.

Stripped of all metaphor, it is cold here, also.

Cheap chivalry and sloth aside, I am daily bound to you in ways proclaiming your status as exception.

And I have never held you except in parting.

Tied up as a child, I flirt with freedom, triggered by buildings and off-ramps and guard rails and walls. For years, I have been alive, when what I wanted was to be dead and I have never regretted my repeated attempts at longevity. Like axe-murderers, I regret nothing.

This is all so slight, and plotless and boring. We've heard it all in the dead of night, and there's nothing really to be said. Only the little things. A handbook. A guidebook. An unrecorded dial-a-prayer for times of stress. One fears, of course, to call, unless one has a plan. One hates, even then, to be thought frivolous, I suppose. I know it for a fact. And one calls, of course, to be talked out of it, which is the real reason for my reluctance. I want someone who will talk me *into* it, someone to say oh absolutely, what a good idea, just put down the phone and do it now and I'll wait right here. What a good idea.

The appeal of earthquake is that the instructions are so easy to follow. Stay where you are. (The catatonic's dream.) None of this running off to shelters or moving to basements or southwest corners or higher ground. Stay where you are. Naked, at the first tremor, my lover puts on her pants. I laugh. Shirtless and frightened, she is, and lovely. I stay where I am.

This is not intended to depress. I am alive, after all. I am writing this down. After all, I am alive, and I would not depress either of us for the world. I

would like to help you, as others have helped me, as I have been helped by my child and my cats and the morning mail, by grass and mountains and pigeons and plants. I would like to help you as others have helped me, as I have been helped, but it is not easy. I write this down. It is my job, after all. My job is to stay alive as long as I possibly can, and with as much grace as I can muster. I have no time for hobbies.

Sometimes I lie without meaning to, and sometimes I merely lie.

Chapter Three: My Life is Over.

I do not have altars at my weddings.

The warning is clear enough. Self-absorption is to be avoided at any cost. Self-absorption is easy. Anybody can do it. Even women. Especially women, say the folk who tell us it is to be avoided at any cost. Say the folk who dismiss our writers as "feminine," and our geniuses as "androgynous." Less than human. Less than men. But I digress, and you must humor me, because it is the only way either of us will survive.

You must humor me, but you must be patient, too. The events of my life are not yet mine. I have moved often, and am widely known. I would tell you if I could, but since they are not yet mine, they seem unreal, even to me. We've been through all this before. I have explained it already, and yet you fidget. Listen. Your life is exactly like mine.

When we were married, then, we felt what? Resignation and disbelief, mostly (my life is over) and the weight, of course, of the guest list, and then, at bottom, we felt: If it doesn't work out there's always divorce. And we were right, of course, and we spent our days in school at the office scrubbing floors having babies, and our nights trying to remember the simple solution we had so successfully repressed since our wedding day.

But enough of that. You know the chorus. Your experience has been validated. You are not alone. There are others, and if that doesn't comfort you in your hour of need, then all I can say is that you're probably just resentful and bitter as hell and withering away like crazy out there in your slum, and probably never liked men anyway, and what makes you think the world owes you a living. The world doesn't owe you shit, lady.

Pick out the ones with children.

But enough of that. The secret of overcoming one's fears and coping with life (jollyng oneself along), is to stop oneself whenever one thinks an unpleasant thought, or hears, as it were, a discouraging word, and to substitute a pleasant thought, a delightful image, or some other form of gratification. My own personal favorites are England, seat belts, and folded clothes.

Self-absorption is when you are so intimate nobody knows what you're talking about, or cares, either, and it is to be avoided at all costs. But I'm real enough, whether you like it or not. Self-absorption and femininity aside, I'm real enough. Real as a Shakespearian Jew.

I'm lining you up now, all of you, like the woman on Romper Room, with her magic mirror, and I can see the way your hair curls or doesn't and I see your shoes and your children and I know where you live.

Even in California, there are problems.

We love and hate ourselves and them and us, and locked in private struggles, emerge as groups and groups and groups, like waves or shingles or almonds on a cake.

I distrust images, even this, (as the saying goes), but what else do I have, after all. What else can I present as proof or visual aid? And must we go through it all again? Who can be blamed for clinging to *Heidi* or *Gone With the Wind*? They're by women after all. And barring that, we've had hundreds of years of literary pain. Do we need all that again? Can we examine it without succumbing to it? It hasn't gone away. We fill our notebooks now; we write it down. A million monkeys, writing ourselves into corners and out again. Because it's there.

I began life screaming.

Chapter Four: My Life Begins.

She found salvation everywhere. Even when she was not looking for it. Especially then.

When I am better, I can stop writing this. I will write something else entirely, when I am better and can stop writing this. Chockful of spaniels and asphodels, perhaps, but something different, something else. Something different. I am learning the names of the flowers against the day when I will be able to use them, when I can put them in something. I am learning the names of the flowers as fast as I can. Do I bore you? Do you have lapels? Can I hold you here?

I have scars on my back from fucking in wheatfields, and the blood rushes to all of my wounds, the moment I pick up a pen. You are real to me now, and it is difficult to let you go for that reason. You have been real to me, and I reiterate our touchings like a trail of crumbs. For years, I have made messages with the bowl of my spoon, idly, at first, and finally, with conviction, and even at this distance, you are heart-breaking.

I think now, of green, and the milking of goats, and my work is cut out for me. I am a reader, as I have perhaps mentioned, and my list is exponential and infinite and a solace always, and will see me through as many lifetimes as there are.

My first lover, my first almost lover, the one I loved, who was older, and had already invented Shakespeare and probably the Bible, by the time he was twenty-two, was made entirely of scraps of twine, tied endlessly together and wound and wound. I decorated him like an Xmas tree. He lived in a basement.

I have not found it necessary to decorate my friends. I have married often and for the usual reasons, and I remain naive. Out of bed, for instance, I am intolerant and appalled, enraged by my fascism and theirs, and occasionally unutterably bored. I am a good listener. Predictability distresses me, or predictability in the repetitive sense.

But this is not important. What is important, is that I persevere, that I participate in the little acts of faith which pass for maintenance. That I buy food as though I'll be here to eat it, and books as though to read them; that I make plans in all sincerity, expecting them to be fulfilled.

I persevere, and if I sometimes hide things, close off, shut down, withdraw, it is simply that my plans are smaller, that my plan is survival, survival first, survival most of all. It is a pleasure now, to make those tiny plans, to hear my tiny voice, determined now, giving the order to stay alive. No biggie, as they say. Just the usual. Stay alive. More of the same.

## YOUR PLACE OR MINE

"I've got a ride," she said into the phone. "As far as Denver. Will you come?"

There was a silence, and a crackle, and finally the voice of her friend, from the depths of another phone booth, two thousand miles away. "When? Yes. How long can you stay?"

Strange to hear the voice again. Distant, unreal, to be expected. Their voices pressed flat against the window of their excitement. Normal... Exactly normal.

She went back to the house, and began at once to pack, unable to sit still, the mixture of her joy and fear translating itself to movement. Seven years. Christ.

Two pairs of jeans. Four T-shirts. Underwear. Toothbrush. Hairbrush. Mail-order bride.

She twisted her hair into a knot on top of her head, and secured it with a piece of leather and an orange stick. She had not been sure how she would feel about it, not sure how either of them would feel, and her nervousness was its own answer. She was not going to visit an old friend—she was meeting a lover.

She had left her husband almost as soon as she was sure of her direction— as soon as she was reasonably sure that whatever support or hope or love there was for her would come from women. As soon as she was sure she wanted to live with those things, and not without them. She had gone as far as this house full of women, and no farther. Until now.

There were times when the fact of her celibacy amused her, but sometimes, she felt it as a reproach, a giant inconsistency which mocked both politics and need. Her transitions were all in her mind. She lived and worked with women, and with their children, as well as her own, and accepted their strength and friendship, envying the lovers, even as she held herself back. There was plenty of time, they said. Everybody's different. Plenty of time. But the envy had turned to longing, and friendship was not enough. She wanted more than that now. She needed more than that, and she wanted it from her friend.

She tried now, to smooth her excitement, to arrange her expectations as modestly as possible, lest she be crushed by the weight of rejection, and still the joy bubbled its way beyond her fear, and she was impatient to be off.

Denver. Going to Denver. She repeated the words softly to herself as she carried her suitcase out to the car and put it carefully into the back seat. "I'm going," she said. "I'm really going."

They drove straight through, coaxing the battered Toyota over the rough

spots, Katherine's hands clenched on the steering wheel, knuckles gleaming whitely, as her companion slept. Crossing the desert, there were stars, and seeing them, she struggled to remember the freckled constellations of Lydia's skin, the outlines of her face, her hair.

They went back a long way, she and Lydia. They had met in a logic class, which they had barely passed, even with tutoring, and in the years since, had made their way through four husbands and three children, and half a dozen more or less academic institutions, scattering themselves as far east as Vermont, and as far west as California, in their respective searches for the American Dream. They had slung hash, and sold encyclopedias, and performed abortions, and washed cars, and counseled draft resisters, and cared for their children, and occasionally for themselves, and while they were not quite thirty, they were aging fast.

Katherine smiled. Birthdays. For years, she had been sending Lydia's birthday presents in the middle of summer, although her birthday was not until November, because Lydia herself made every effort to ignore the occasion, insisting that birthdays were "little deaths," and refusing absolutely to cooperate for purposes of celebration.

At first, Katherine had sent packages in summer and at Christmas, with perhaps a book or two in between, but in the last year or so, she had found herself haunting the souvenir counters, loitering by racks of postcards and monogrammed toothbrushes and socks, on her rare excursions to Disneyland or Chinatown, seeking new outlets for the rush of feelings Lydia had aroused in her, wanting to communicate her love in as many ways as possible, without disrupting the life of her friend.

She was embarrassed sometimes, by her own effusiveness—by the profusion of little gifts which she continued to wrap and mail, in spite of herself—sharing things and impressions, and feelings as well as she could at such a distance, when what she wanted to share was the events themselves.

There had been no single moment in their relationship to which Katherine could point, as the line between friendship and love—no single letter, or day, or time, when she had realized with any certainty what she wanted. She had been slow to recognize what would have been obvious to anyone reading their correspondence, and slower still, to admit it to herself. And that done, it had taken her weeks to broach the subject with Lydia. Loving women.

They had never, ever, lived together, even in the days when both of them were in the same place, when neither of them had husbands or lovers, to speak of, when living together would have been eminently practical. Katherine had suggested it once, and Lydia had said *oh-no-I-could-never-live-with-you-we're-too-much-alike-it-would-never-work-out*, or words to that effect, and Katherine had not understood, and had been hurt out of all proportion to the words themselves, and she had not understood her own hurt, and Lydia was her friend, and Katherine didn't understand, and it became another in the series of events which they had made themselves forget.

Seeing her. The mountains. Walking in the woods. Not touching, even now, their voices falling softly around them, and still it wasn't time.

"Do you remember," Lydia asked her, "that time we decided to live together, and then didn't?"

Katherine nodded.

"I was afraid of you—afraid to get that close. I've never told you any of this, have I?"

"No."

"I ran straight to my shrink, and started babbling, dumping all this vague amorphous stuff in his lap—all these incredible things I was feeling about you—expecting him to tell me what to do. Dreams and things, I don't know. Scared the bejesus out of me. As it were."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me if I thought I could ever be a lesbian, and I thought I was going to be sick all over his desk. I tried to explain to him that one time, and I never went back after that."

"I thought it must be my fault," Katherine said, "that I'd done something, or that something was wrong with me; that I must be a terrible person if even my best friend couldn't live with me. I don't remember the details any more, but I remember how much it hurt, and how unexpected it was when you said you didn't think it would work. It was like being hit hard in the stomach for no apparent reason, and I couldn't understand what was happening."

"I have scars on my back," Lydia said, "from fucking in wheat fields."

"I'd certainly like to see them, sometime," Katherine said.

"I know."

"I'm not as patient as I thought I'd be," Katherine said. "I thought it would just happen, somehow. I didn't think about needing a place to begin. I didn't count on both of us being this shy. Certainly not at the same time."

Lydia laughed.

"We're still avoiding it," Katherine said, "you know we are. We've been walking for days, avoiding it. Walking so we don't have to sit down, except at mealtimes, with a table between us. Can't we touch each other, without leaping into bed? Can't we try it at least, without a big production? My god, Lydi, even strangers shake hands." Katherine turned to face her, stopping in the middle of the path, and Lydia stood still. Katherine put her hand on Lydia's cheek, and then moved it gently to the back of her neck, and upwards to the base of her skull, moving towards her until their bodies were nearly touching. "I've never seen your ears," she said softly. "Never, ever, seen your ears." She felt Lydia tensing, and took her hand away. Lydia did not like to be touched. Even as a preliminary to sex. Especially then.

Katherine knew all that, because Lydia had told her. It was nothing personal, it was merely the last line of defense, but Katherine did not know what to do. This was something separate from their feelings for each other, some childhood relic, some emotional baggage from another time . . .

And there, the fantasy broke down, each of them retrenching, returning to work and home and children, asserting their independence by planting flowers and buying books, digging in. Here, and there, the two of them surviving, going on; writing letters or not writing letters. Going on.

But for Katherine, at least, nothing was ever again quite the same. The longing persisted, and she fell in and out of love a dozen times in the next two years before she knew what was happening. There were days when she thought it had been a dream, or when she thought she had really recovered; days, even, when she could harden herself against the letters, against Lydia herself, and the memory of her.

Things continued to happen. Lydia found an apartment and moved out for the summer, leaving her husband whom she described as a cipher, and moving in again, before the ink was dry on her change-of-address forms. Her husband moved out and in again, and finally out, taking the TV with him, and that, at least, was a blessing, and there were lovers, and her work was going well.

Katherine left the collective, and found an apartment, settled, almost incidentally, into celibacy, and began again to correspond. And slowly, their separate wounds began to heal. They had in common not only their scattered pasts, but somehow, each other. In evolving, they had coalesced, and their letters were full of common ground.

Their letters. There were times when Katherine could not write at all, when the act of writing was too painful, when the only way she could survive at all was by blocking everything. She was enraged. Outwardly, she took it all in stride, mentioning Lydia casually now and then, but never talking about it really. Knowing, with the obscure romantic certainty of the cynic, that she would always love Lydia; that there was no help for it, that as long as she lived, there would be this love, this bond, this monstrous attachment, this chilling fear.

She was not, by nature, a morbid person. She was not a dweller upon misfortune. She felt deeply, or not at all, and this was what frightened her.

It was, she knew, her fear and her pride which kept her glued to the coast, in the little house two blocks from the fault line—her fear and her pride, the latter so recently acquired, which separated her from what she wanted.

She had followed her husbands automatically, as if asleep, as she had done everything else in those years, and it had been important to her to start again. She had never consciously chosen to live anywhere, and to move to the provinces to be with Lydia seemed like a sure admission of defeat. A giving in. Not meeting someone halfway, but saying I can't live without you, so here I am. Surely an unfortunate phrase. Unfortunate and untrue. She could live without Lydia. She'd been doing it for years.

But what sense did that make, she wondered, brushing at the first of her tears, angry now, and impatient. What sense did it make to be here? She had friends, of course, and there was the city and the ocean, but there was also the noise and the dirt and the violence and the insanity of the people who lived in it, and she was happy here, except for Lydia, and she had survived, and could continue to survive if she had to, but what was the point. What was the point.

I'm afraid, she said aloud. I'm afraid if I go I'll ruin it. That she won't love me any more, or that I won't love her. That I will have destroyed something splendid because it's too soon or too late, or something. That we'll wear it out or destroy each other.

And the mixture of pride and fear, what was that? Duels began and ended, strangers married, fodder was found for the cannons because saying no was not easy, and dreams were continually dessicated because saying yes was just as hard. Saying anything at all was the problem. Deciding.

She had been trained to morality and ethics and justice, and understood good and bad and greater good and greater bad, and was untroubled by the necessity of making moral decisions, but she had not been trained to think of herself, of what she wanted or needed or desired. Her decisions had been made for her by others, or largely by default: her husbands, her alma maters, her child. The divorces had been her choice, but by the time it had occurred to her, it was not so much an option as an imperative. But still, she had chosen some things. Little things, at first.

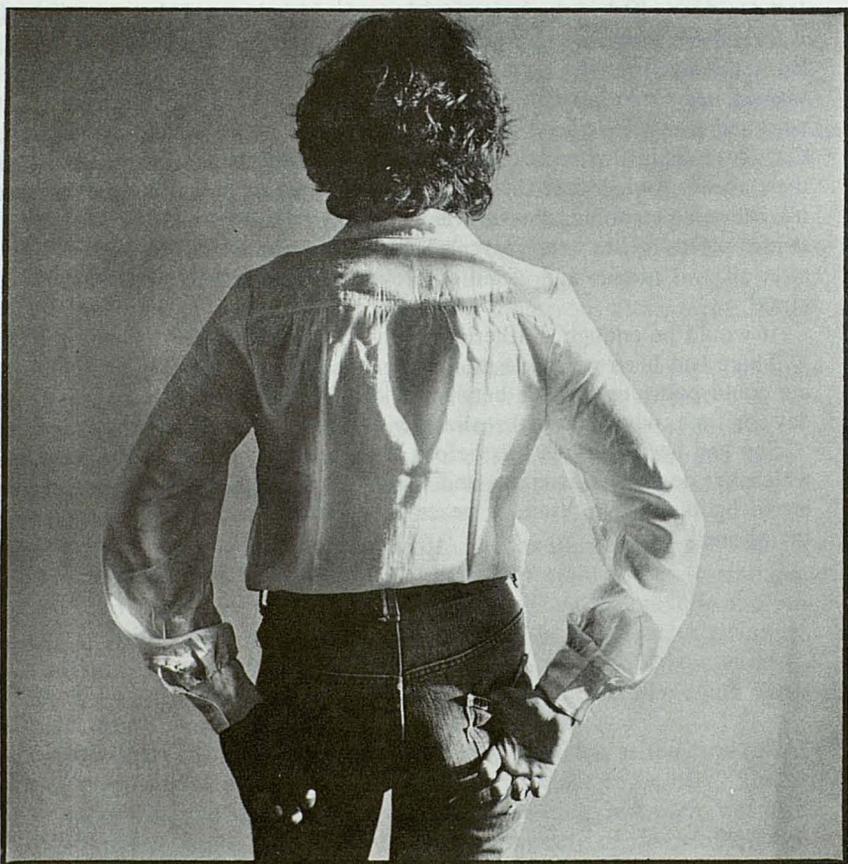
She had been through this before. She had chosen again and again in the last ten years, and each choice had brought her closer to the person she now was, and her choices had made her stronger and less afraid. Her choices had led her away from the world of men, and into the arms of women, and the women had made her stronger and less afraid, and had led her again to Lydia, who had loved her always, since the days when Lydia was always ahead of her. More sophisticated, worldly, articulate: divorced and degreed. Always a little ahead. And at first there had been the awe of her, and then the catching up, the understanding, the knowledge of her fallibility, the knowledge of the tender places of her heart, revealed, but never probed. So Lydia was human after all, was human and afraid and loved her. Was afraid and human and afraid.

It would be enough, Katherine thought, to be with her.

There had been no single moment in their relationship, to which Katherine could point, as the line between friendship and love—no single letter, or day, or time, when she had realized with any certainty what she wanted.

She had been through this before, and there was no single moment in which her decision was made, and there was no clap of thunder, no flashing of lights, no sigh, even, of peace or resolution as she sat in her chair by the phone.

# DRAMA



*Bad Attitude*

*June 79*

## AN ORAL HERSTORY OF LESBIANISM

*An Oral Herstory of Lesbianism is an experimental theater project about lesbian culture and experience, which was conceived and produced by Terry Wolverton at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles in May 1979. It was collaboratively written, directed, and performed by thirteen lesbians: Jerry Allyn, Nancy Angelo, Leslie Belt, Cheri Gaulke, Chutney Gunderson, Brook Hallok, Sue Maberry, Louise Moore, Arlene Raven, Catherine Stifter, Cheryl Swannack, Christine Wong, and Terry Wolverton.*

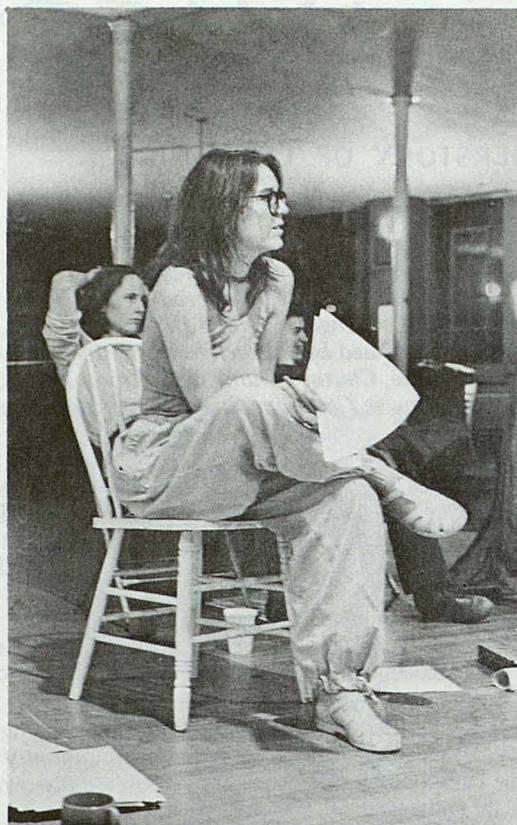
My vision of *An Oral Herstory of Lesbianism* was to gather lesbians together to create theater about our own lives, as lesbians. I chose to call it *An Oral Herstory* and not *The Oral Herstory*; I didn't want to make a definitive statement that said all lesbians are this or that, but to say this is who we are. This play is only one beginning in the creation of our lesbian herstory and mythology.

My primary source of inspiration was my work with Arlene Raven in the Lesbian Art Project. As co-directors of LAP, we had been concerned with the exploration of lesbian art and lesbian sensibility, and with the development of our working community. Our methods of "researching" relied heavily on an examination of our own feelings and experiences as a basis for understanding lesbianism as a mythic identity. Other inspiration came from the community of the Woman's Building, a public center for women's culture, and from my own work since 1973 in experimental collaborative feminist theater.

I began by advertising for participants, though many women heard about the project by word of mouth. Contrary to the normal audition process, I wanted the group to be self-selected. I was willing to work with any woman who was willing to sign the contract I had prepared. This contract was eight pages long; it outlined the vision, structure, and schedule of the project, as well as financial and copyright agreements. The contract articulated the mutual commitments which formed the basis of our group trust. Whenever disagreements—either personal or work-related—arose, we could refer to our commitments as a way to resolve those problems.

Twelve women contracted to participate in all workshop processes, to create the material for the play and to perform in it. Additionally, each of the thirteen of us contributed \$100 or more to the production fund. This money paid for rehearsal space, about half of the production expenses, and a small salary to me for facilitating the workshops. A number of other lesbians contributed time, money, materials, skills, and feedback to the project. Over fifty lesbians were responsible for creating *Oral*.

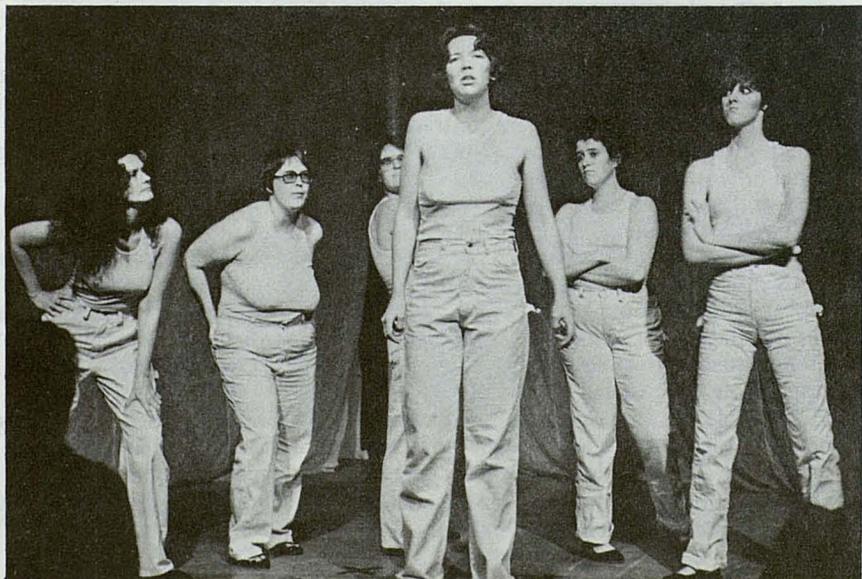
I was blessed to have twelve such talented collaborators: all self-defined lesbians active in the women's and lesbian movements, all self-identified as artists and creators in a wide variety of fields. These women shared a genuine investment in the project, a strong desire to produce work of excellence, and a deep commitment to communicating their lesbian vision.



*top: Terry Wolverton,  
giving cast feedback at  
rehearsal.*

*bottom: "Standards/  
Acceptance." Front,  
center: Leslie Belt;  
left to right: Arlene  
Raven, Brook Hallok,  
Catherine Stifter,  
Nancy Angelo, and  
Cheri Gaulke.*

**photographs by  
Jo Goodwin**



Our process of creating the play began with ten workshops, in which I combined techniques and exercises gathered from theater, feminist education, body therapies, women's spirituality, and childhood games. These included C-R, role-playing, journal writing, psychic meditation, improvisational acting, and sound and movement games. In these workshops we explored such topics as: coming out; relationships; mothers; body and self image; separatism; homophobia; stereotypes; roles; and sexuality. In addition to generating material for the performance, these workshops provided an opportunity for personal growth, and a feeling of trust and sharing within the group.

At the end of these sessions, it was our responsibility to decide the content, form, and style of our performance, and to create it. We became a collaborative group, each contributing writing, direction, and performance. Some women also devoted energy to various aspects of the production, including sets, sound, and lighting.

This collaboration was a difficult and challenging process. We brought to the project different beliefs, experiences, skills, and aesthetics, as well as divergent styles, tastes, and artistic goals. It was not easy to reach consensus. My own difficulties focussed on being able to maintain my investment, responsibility, and leadership, while being able to share all of those things with the other women. Divergent viewpoints seemed threatening to me—I had to learn to expand my trust that other ideas, other styles would work.

We had made a commitment to honor our diversity, and we tried to proceed with a policy of inclusion and constructive criticism. That meant that everyone worked vigorously to improve each piece, rather than cutting it out of the show. The challenge for all of us was to honor other women's work as much as our own, and to each take individual responsibility to be satisfied with the whole performance.

The impact of group process on each piece is immeasurable: although specific women are credited with the authorship of individual scenes, all have received input from the entire group, including rewriting, characterization, and staging suggestions. The result is a blend of styles, viewpoints, and emotions, which hopefully reflects the diversity and depth of lesbian sensibility.

Our audiences consisted of women only, and ranged between 20-60 on each of the thirteen performance nights. We deliberately kept the audience limited, to create a real intimacy between us. The response of those who saw the play was overwhelmingly positive and supportive. Women were touched by the honesty of the stories, and identified with them. *An Oral Herstory of Lesbianism* has become part of our community mythology, extending beyond those of us who created it, and those of us who viewed it. Claiming our herstory is a step toward creating our future.

—Terry Wolverton

## TWO SCENES FROM

### AN ORAL HERSTORY OF LESBIANISM

#### STANDARDS/ACCEPTANCE

written by Terry Wolverton and performed by Leslie Belt, Arlene Raven, Brook Hallok, Catherine Stifter, Nancy Angelo, and Cheri Gaulke.

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*"Standards/Acceptance" grew out of a workshop exercise where we answered the question, "What do I want/need from lesbians?" In my own answer, I first enacted my need to have lesbians give up patriarchal behaviors ("Don't eat meat, don't watch TV, don't have men friends"). Then I went to each woman in the group, asking her to accept me, even though my behavior differed from her standards ("even though I have long hair," "even though I listen to Stevie Wonder records"). During group feedback time, we discussed this contradiction, and how our lesbian "standards" hinder our acceptance of one another.*

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*The previous scene is The Journey into Lesbian Consciousness, a humorous scene in which each woman moves through a "birth canal." As Leslie completes her trip, she falls, and the rest of the women surround her, support her to stand, and lovingly comfort her. Leslie triumphantly proclaims, "It didn't hurt a bit!" and begins to stand on her own. The others begin to move back from her, forming a loose semi-circle around and behind her.*

**Leslie:** Well, I finally made it! I'm a lesbian! Really, I'm a dyke! (*She struts around, enjoying the feeling.*)

**Arlene,** *leans toward her, shaking a finger:* Uh Uh Uh! A Lesbian should never eat meat!

**Leslie:** Whaddaya mean? Fried chicken is my favorite food!

**Arlene:** Men oppress animals the same way they oppress women!

**Leslie:** Well, I guess that makes sense. Ok, no meat! I'm gonna be a good lesbian!

**Brook:** A Lesbian must never relate to men. They are the enemy!

**Leslie:** Aww, but you can't mean Rick! I've known him for five years. He's not my enemy.

**Nancy:** *And* a Lesbian must give up television and punk rock. Male culture exploits women and poisons our consciousness.

**Leslie:** But—I Love "Lucy"!

**Catherine:** (*All take one step towards Leslie, menacingly*) A Lesbian must not be classist, racist, sexist, looksist, thinnist, capitalist . . .

**Cheri:** (*All step forward again. Leslie reacts to each step with her body, more "hemmed in."*) A Lesbian must be out of the closet to everyone, all of the time!

**Arlene:** A Lesbian must not use drugs or alcohol!

**Brook:** A Lesbian must always wear short hair and blue jeans!

**Nancy:** *And* A Lesbian must give up Twinkies, Dingdongs, machaca burritos, Oreos, all processed foods, coffee, sugar . . .

**Leslie:** (*Interrupting—this is the last straw*) Just wait a minute! I never thought being a lesbian meant there'd be so many things to reconsider. No one ever told me I might have to give up dessert! I can't give up everything at once and still live in this world! I guess my journey into lesbian consciousness is gonna take longer than I thought. (*She is discouraged.*)

The others begin moving offstage, some still spurning Leslie, others offering support. Catherine pats her on the back, says, "Hey, Leslie, don't worry about it." When everyone else leaves, Brook approaches Leslie.

**Brook:** Hey, Leslie, you got a cigarette?

**Leslie:** Oh sure—hey, I thought you quit? (*Brook smiles and shrugs.*) You know, you really ought to! See, men and cigarettes oppress women just like animals . . . (*Arm in arm, the two exit as the lights fade to blackout.*)

## JUMP ROPE/INCEST

written and choreographed by Leslie Belt, Jeri Allyn, Cheri Gaulke, Chutney Gunderson, and Christine Wong.

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*In creating "Jump Rope/Incest," Leslie Belt wanted to share her experience of being molested as a child, but was afraid she would validate the stereotype that incest "caused" her lesbianism. Instead, by using a playground setting, where the other "children" chanted lesbian nursery rhymes, she shows how her women's community gives her the support and courage to talk about and heal from that experience.*

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*Lights up. A long rope is tossed onstage. Cheri enters, walking it.*

**Cheri:** Thin lines require careful consideration to maintain. You must watch carefully each and every step or else you might (*she teeters, then regains balance*) TRIP! Or what usually happens is that you get so tired of being careful, that you jump (*she does*) . . . and everything changes!

*Chris, Jerri, Chutney, and Leslie run onstage as children, yelling and playing. Two women pick up the ends of the rope and begin twirling it as a jump rope. Cheri jumps in.*

**Cheri:** I love coffee, and I love tea.

I love Sue

And she loves me! (*She jumps out, takes Jerri's end.*)

**Jerri, jumps in:** Sue and Cheri, sitting in a tree,

K-I-S-S-I-N-G, and S-I-N-G-I-N-G

and L-I-C-K-I-N-G! (*Others hoot and tease her, she jumps out.*)

**Chutney, jumps in:** I love coffee, and I love tea

And I love Jerri and Terry and Bia and Chris and Sue and . . .

*(Others yell 'Chutney!' She exits, takes Chris's end.)*

**Chris, jumps in:** Some girls are lovers

And some girls are friends

But every girl's got a story

About where she's been.

Tell us girl, where've you been?

Leslie! (*She jumps out.*)

*As Leslie begins jumping, the mood changes from pure fun to something more ominous. The lights dim.*

**Leslie:** When I was five I found out  
that the men you gotta trust  
are the men you better doubt.  
My grandfather was a child molester  
until the day he died  
I was first molested by him  
at the age of five.

**Chut and Cheri** (rope turners): Evvy, iivy over (*singsong*)

**Leslie:** And over and over and over again  
night after night for the next two years  
until we moved away from him.

**Chut and Cheri:** Not last night but the night before  
24 robbers came knocking at my door  
As I ran out (*Leslie jumps out.*) They run in

**Leslie:** (*standing downstage*) And then it only happened  
Every now and then.  
I didn't tell my daddy cuz I was afraid of what he'd do  
I didn't tell my grandpa, cuz he already knew  
I didn't tell my Mama cuz she'd be so sad  
I didn't tell anyone—I thought I was bad. (*She turns and runs back through the still-turning jumprope. Stands with back to audience, others.*)

**Chut and Cheri** (*singing but offkey*): A little girl went to school, school, school,  
to learn all of the rules, rules, rules,  
but all she did was cry and she wouldn't say why  
so everyone thought she was a fool, fool, fool.

**Leslie:** No I'm not! Wait, I'll play. (*Jumps in*) Do you know Cinderella  
Cinderella kissed a fella?

**Chut and Cheri** (*chanting quietly through segment*): Cinderella kissed a fella,  
Cinderella kissed a fella

**Leslie:** Cinderella kissed a fella in the dark of night  
He took off her clothes, said No one must know  
And he touched her til it grew light

**Chut and Cheri:** What are little girls made of?  
What are little girls made of?

**Leslie** (*jumps out, comes to audience*): Sugar and spice and other people's lies  
That's what little girls are made of

**Chut and Cheri:** Upstairs, downstairs, all around the house  
the little girl was quiet, quiet as a mouse  
Ollie, Ollie Oxen, Free, Free, Free (*this is repeated softly by all on stage. Lights brighten up as in beginning*)

**Jerri** (*jumps in*): I love coffee, and I love tea  
I love Leslie, and she loves me!

**Leslie** (*jumps in and jumps with Jerri*):  
I've got friends now who listen to me  
And they will on any day  
But is there a little girl on your street  
who's got something to say?  
  
I was twenty years old when my grandpa died  
And I like him better dead than alive  
I'd like to believe every little girl's free  
But how many child molesters live on your street?

*The jumpers begin doing "hot peppers"—jumping as fast as they can, counting "One, two, three, four, five . . ." As soon as someone misses, the rope is thrown down in anger, and all exit. Blackout.*

# I KNOW A HUNDRED WAYS TO DIE

## A One-Act Play

*A bedroom in a modest apartment in New York City. The furnishings are old and simple. Min occupies a double bed. She is propped by pillows in a semi-sitting position on the left side of the bed. Next to her stands a card table, very neatly arranged with a telephone, a note pad, two pencils, three pens, her checkbook, her glasses case in the first row. Behind these items—two post cards, a note card propped open, a small Indian doll on a base, a vase of fresh flowers. There is a bedside table at the head of the bed, and carefully placed on this table are beautifully bound copies of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*. In the wall to Min's right is a large window. Henrietta sits on a rocking chair in a narrow space between the window and Min's bed, engaged in doing the *New York Times* daily crossword puzzle. Min is seventy-eight. She has rosy cheeks, straight thin white hair. Henrietta is sixty, large boned, vigorous, almost looming in presence. The rocking chair is not large enough for her.*

*Min is wearing a light blue cotton nightgown and a worn, pink bed jacket. She wears a wrist watch. It is three o'clock on a week day afternoon. Henrietta is immersed in her newspaper.*

### SCENE 1

**Min**, smoothing the covers on her bed, making a neat border with the sheet:  
She'll be arriving soon.

**Henrietta**: Yes, I suppose so.

*A long silence during which Min watches Henrietta but Henrietta never looks up.*

**Min**: Henrietta. I wish you wouldn't do that crossword puzzle. We're expecting company.

**Henrietta**: Well, she's not here yet. *Glancing up for a second.*

**Min**: Don't tell me the obvious.

**Henrietta**: You asked for it.

**Min** sticks her lower lip out at **Henrietta**, holds this pouting gesture until **Henrietta** looks up and sees.

**Henrietta**: Does it make you nervous that she's coming?

**Min**: Me? Why do you say that?

**Henrietta**: You're excited . . . and a little cross. A cross between . . .

**Min**: Hen, stop. This is no time for being clever.

**Henrietta**: Well, are you going to be cooperative?

**Min**: Do I have a choice?

**Henrietta**: Evidently you do. She seems very democratic. Remember last week when she came she asked you about your goals.

**Min**: Oh, yes. What would you like to be doing, said she, that you can't do now.  
Dear me, I replied. Everything.

Could you be more specific, said she.

**Henrietta**: Have you been thinking about it like you were supposed to this week?

**Min**: Oh, Hen, of course not. I'm too old to make lists. I don't think I'll talk to her at all today. I think I'll just do as she says with the exercises. I'll say I'm too tired to talk. You can tell her what I want. You don't have to tell her I don't believe in having serious conversation with anyone under forty.

**Henrietta:** Dare I remind you that you were the chair of the Classics Department of the Barney School for twenty-five years, during which time you communed daily with fifteen and sixteen year olds to say nothing of your beloved senior seminar seventeen year olds.

**Min:** It's not the same. They were children. She's in between. Besides, this is my . . . is it my thirteenth year of retirement? Am I seventy-seven or seventy-eight?

**Henrietta:** Seventy-eight.

**Min, pleading:** Oh, dear. Doesn't that sound too old for me, Hen?

**Henrietta:** You don't look it.

**Min, patting her legs through the covers and smiling:** It's nice of you to say so.

*After a pause:* I didn't finish. I meant to say it's you who communes daily with the fifteen and sixteen year olds at the Barney School while I commune with the border of my sheet and with you. So since you are in such good form, you may converse with my therapist.

**Henrietta:** Miss Heart.

**Min:** Yes, Miss Heart or Vivian?

**Henrietta:** Well, she's *your* therapist. What do you prefer? Shall we call her Vivian?

**Min, impatiently:** You decide.

**Henrietta:** Very well, I shall call her Miss Heart.

**Min:** I was sure that was what you would choose. I have always loved you for your formality, Henrietta.

**Henrietta:** Instructed by yourself, of course. I suppose it was a great stroke of fortune for me that you spoke to me during my in between years.

**Min, chuckling:** But dear, *you* were exceptional. However, notice that I didn't invite you to live with me until you were forty-two . . . for good measure. Now I don't know what I'd do . . .

**Henrietta:** You'd probably be willing to talk to Miss Heart.

**Min, stubbornly:** I don't think so. *She looks around at the order of the room and fondles various objects with her eyes. She appears very satisfied with everything.*

**Min:** Hen, do you think she's one of our kind?

**Henrietta:** What do you mean?

**Min:** *Miss Heart.*

**Henrietta:** Have you forgotten that you are Mrs?

**Min:** Of course, I forgot years ago . . . but you know what I mean.

**Henrietta:** I suppose I do. **Henrietta** looks out the window and **Min** stares at her for a full minute waiting for her to speculate.

**Min, annoyed:** What are you looking at?

**Henrietta:** The bulldozer.

**Min:** What's it doing?

**Henrietta:** Making a pile of dirt.

**Min:** Well, what do you think?

**Henrietta:** How would I know?

**Min:** You go to a psychiatrist. Doesn't she teach you how to read people's minds?

**Henrietta, looking out the window, does not answer. There is much tension between them in the silence that follows this remark.**

**Min**, *quietly*: I'm sorry, Hen. I'll sit here and be quiet and behave myself. *She rests her head back and closes her eyes and Henrietta picks up the pencil and crossword puzzle from the window sill and begins doing it again. Min speaks without opening her eyes.*

**Min**: She did seem to take our life together with equanimity, unlike most of those ninnies we met when I was in the hospital. **Henrietta** *waits until Min appears to be dozing, then puts the paper down, studies Min's face and smiles.*

**Min** *is startled awake by the ringing of the doorbell. She sits up excitedly.*

**Min**: It must be her.

**Henrietta**: It must. *She rises slowly.*

**Min**: Hurry, Hen. She might think we're not home.

**Henrietta**: Wherever would she think we'd have gone?

*She exits. Min makes a face at her back, rearranges the covers again, dusts lint off her bed jacket, and takes on a look of great impatience as the voices of Vivian and Henrietta can be heard in the background but not loudly enough to understand what they are saying. Min has an ear cocked toward the door. She changes to a look of disinterest as she hears them coming down the hall. Vivian enters.*

*Henrietta right behind her gestures broadly with her arms that she is turning her over to Min. Min continues to appear remote. Vivian is an attractive young woman, about 30, simply dressed. She is smaller than Min, has an athletic appearance. Her eyes are very attentive and have taken in the room but most of the time stay directly on Min. During the ensuing conversation, Henrietta returns to her chair and puzzle.*

**Vivian**: Hello.

**Min**: Good afternoon.

**Vivian**: How are you feeling?

**Min**: As usual.

**Vivian**: I'm not sure I know how you usually feel.

**Min**: Of course you don't. *Smiling*: Henrietta can tell you. **Vivian** *looks to Henrietta who hasn't been listening.*

**Min**: Hen.

**Henrietta**: What?

**Min**: Tell Miss Heart how I usually feel.

**Henrietta**: Well, Miss Heart. She usually feels cross when I am trying to do my puzzle. I would definitely interpret it as a sign of ill health if she were not cross during such a time.

**Min**, *in a whisper audible to all*: I abhor crossword puzzles. Don't you?

**Vivian**: No.

**Min**, *disappointed*: Well, at least you're honest.

**Vivian**, *indicating the table*: Can I move this?

**Min**: You may. Just as long as you don't disturb the arrangement of my things.

**Vivian**: I'll just slide it back here.

**Min**: Henrietta, where's Miss Heart going to sit?

**Henrietta**, *indicating the chair by the dresser*: That chair's just fine. Move it wherever you need it.

**Vivian**, *arranging herself alongside Min's legs*: How about some exercise?

**Min**: I suppose I must.

**Vivian**: How did you do with those exercises I gave you last week?

**Min**, with an impish grin: Hen. How did I do with those exercises?

**Henrietta**: Oh. Min didn't do too well with those exercises.

**Vivian**: What was the problem?

**Min**: I forgot.

**Vivian**: Oh, that's okay. I'll go over them again with you.

**Min**: That's very generous of you, but I'm afraid you don't understand. It's not that I forgot *how* to do them.

**Vivian**: Oh, you mean you forgot to do them. **Min** looks very sheepish.

**Henrietta**: Yes, Miss Heart, that's what she means. **Vivian** takes the covers off **Min's** left leg and instructs her in the exercise by demonstrating how to move the leg up and down.

**Vivian**: Do you not like to do the exercises?

**Min**, cheerfully: I don't mind. I just forgot.

**Vivian**: You're in bed all day, right?

**Min**: Yes.

**Vivian**, moving **Min's** leg up to her chest and back down while quietly repeating the commands—lift, push: Lift . . . What do you do with your time?

**Min**: Hen . . . tell Miss Heart what I do with my time.

**Henrietta**, pleasantly: You tell her.

**Min**, in an aside to **Henrietta**: You're supposed to do the talking.

**Henrietta**: But you're doing so well. *There is a silence except for Vivian continuing the commands. Min puts her thumbs in her ears and wiggles her fingers at Henrietta. Vivian chuckles gently at the gesture.*

**Vivian**: Lift . . . push . . . okay, rest. **Min** drops her leg on the bed as if it's very heavy.

**Min**: Miss Heart, I believe you are wearing me out.

**Vivian**: Please, call me Vivian.

**Min**: I'll try, but **Henrietta** and I come from a very formal tradition.

**Vivian**: So . . . are you going to tell me what you do with your time?

**Min**: Let's see. I play with my memory.

**Vivian**, seriously: Do you have trouble with your memory?

**Min**: Perhaps, from your point of view.

**Vivian**, puzzled: I don't get it.

**Min**: Well, I forgot to do my exercises, didn't I? Otherwise my memory is about all I have. I can't read. My eyes are no good. I can't walk. My legs are no good.

**Henrietta**, clucking: Poor dear.

**Min**: I can always be cross with **Henrietta** when she's home.

**Vivian**: And when she isn't?

**Min**: That's when I recite my verses.

**Vivian**: Push your leg out to the side now. Really? Poetry?

**Min**: Of course.

**Vivian**: You know it by heart?

**Min**: Selected poems, yes. Do you know any poetry?

**Vivian**: Not by heart . . . but I like poetry.

**Min**: Perhaps you should commit your favorites now so that should you become my age and have a tumor on your spinal cord and your legs turn feeble with paralysis, you'll be able to have your poets at your bedside.

**Vivian:** Push your leg again. I think it's wonderful that you do that.

**Min:** You don't mind that I forgot my exercises.

**Vivian:** No, but I don't think you're going to be able to improve your strength by just doing these once a week with me.

**Min:** Well, I've never wanted to play tennis.

**Vivian:** Push . . .

**Min, studying Vivian who is intent on the exercise:** How strong do you think I could become?

**Vivian:** Pull . . . I can't say for sure. Maybe strong enough to walk around your apartment. You said you'd think about goals this week. What did you come up with?

**Min, turning to Henrietta and speaking playfully:** Hen, did you hear that? She asked . . . just like you said she was going to.

**Henrietta:** Yes, Min. She did.

**Vivian:** Well?

**Min:** What is it that you want to know?

**Vivian:** What things you'd like to do that you can't do.

**Min, slightly embarrassed:** Well . . . you're a woman. You know. I'd probably like to do the same things you'd like to do.

**Vivian, stopping the exercise and sitting up straight:** I could assume but I might assume wrong . . .

**Min:** I would be the first to tell you. Hen, tell Miss Heart, I mean Vivian . . . please assure Vivian that I will not hesitate to speak up if she goes wrong.

**Henrietta:** Min is not known for mincing words.

**Vivian, looking a bit worried:** Look, I would think one of the most important things for your comfort would be to be able to get yourself out of bed and walk with the walker into the bathroom and use the toilet.

**Min twiddles her thumbs and does not speak.**

**Vivian:** Well? Wouldn't you like to be able to do that?

**Min:** Frankly, dear, you should ask Henrietta because I'm sure *she* would love it. As for myself, I don't find it a worthy goal. *She crosses her arms on her chest, stubbornly.*

**Vivian:** You don't mind the bed pan?

**Min:** Actually . . . no. It required a certain adjustment at first, but once one has adjusted, one might even consider it a luxury.

**Henrietta:** Presuming one is the one confined to bed. Vivian is being quite sensible, and after all you've instructed her to decide for you so I think you should take her more seriously, Min.

**Min, looking at Henrietta:** I am perfectly serious. *Turning to Vivian:* She's only being a bad sport. If she were the one confined, I would be perfectly pleasant about serving her the bed pan. **Henrietta rolls her eyes up in disbelief.** **Vivian looks uncomfortable about starting a fight between them.**

**Vivian:** Okay, let's do some exercises with the other leg. *She brings it out from under the covers and drapes the left leg:* Now lift up . . . push . . . lift . . . how about the kitchen?

**Min:** What about the kitchen?

**Vivian:** Would you like to be able to go out to the kitchen?

**Min:** What on earth for?

**Vivian:** I don't know. Do you like to cook?

**Min:** I ab-hor cooking.

**Vivian:** Oh . . . Lift . . . push . . .

**Min:** One of the very few rewards of my confinement is the fact that I don't have to cook . . . ever again.

**Vivian:** But I expect you'll be able to recover enough strength . . .

**Min:** To cook? I certainly hope not.

**Vivian, looking confused:** But . . .

**Min:** What's the matter?

**Henrietta:** Her business is rehabilitation.

**Min:** Oh, but you won't stop coming, will you?

**Vivian, slightly irritated:** I expect to come next week, but at some point I feel we need to establish some mutual goals for what I'm doing with you.

**Min:** Well, there's more to life than the bathroom and the kitchen, is there not? I hope you don't mind that I don't care for the mundane.

**Vivian, covering for being caught in short thinking:** Indeed, there must be more. So far I'm not doing so well at guessing for you. Why don't you just tell me?

**Min, consoling:** Now, now, dear Miss Heart. We've having a grand time. I'm quite pleased with you. It's much more fun this way. **Sitting back:** Proceed, dear heart.

**Vivian:** For the time being I'd settle for your taking a walk with me.

**Min, astonished:** But I can't walk. My legs are rubbery.

**Vivian:** I don't mean on your own. We'll use the walker and I'll help you support yourself.

**Min:** That's not what I call walking.

**Vivian:** Okay . . . whatever you want to call it, let's get you up and see what you can do.

**Min:** Henrietta, did you hear? She wants me to get out of bed. Tell her I can't. Tell her how feeble I am.

**Henrietta, quietly spiteful:** She's tested your muscles, Min, and she seems to know her business.

**Min, to Vivian:** She's sore about the bed pan. **Vivian watches Min wrinkle up her nose at Henrietta and waits for her.** Next week. I have to have time to think about this. **Vivian nods assent. Min breathes a large sigh of relief.**

**Min:** Where would we walk to anyway?

**Vivian:** Well . . . certainly not the bathroom or the kitchen. *They both laugh.*

**Min:** Certainly not.

**Vivian:** Perhaps the living room.

**Min:** It seems so far.

**Vivian:** We'll see. To prepare yourself I want you to sit up on the edge of the bed with your feet on the floor at least once a day for fifteen or twenty minutes.

**Min:** Did you hear, Henrietta?

**Henrietta:** Yes, I think we can manage that.

**Min:** Should I get dressed for the occasion?

**Vivian:** If you like . . . but it's not necessary.

**Min, with jollity:** You won't mind accompanying me with my bed clothes?

**Vivian:** Not at all.

**Min:** Henrietta, she's quite nice. Don't you think so? I think we're lucky to have found Miss Heart.

**Henrietta:** Yes, I think she's doing an admirable job of getting on with you. If you recall what you said just before she came . . .

**Min:** Don't tell. That wouldn't be nice at all.

**Vivian:** What? What were you saying?

**Min:** Oh, it was nothing. Henrietta and I were just discussing our maturity and the lack of appreciation for our wisdom in the general population. **Vivian covers Min's legs and straightens the bed. Min leans back and relaxes.**

**Min, reciting:** I, being born a woman and distressed  
By all the needs and notions of my kind . . .

**Vivian:** What is that?

**Min:** The beginning of a sonnet which ends:  
. . . Let me make it plain:  
I find this frenzy insufficient reason  
For conversation when we meet again.

**Min appears to be deep in reverie.**

**Henrietta, quietly, as if not to disturb Min:** I'm not sure which one of us she plans not to speak to again, but perhaps we can resume next week, Miss Heart. I believe Min is quite tired now.

**Vivian:** Yes, of course. *She puts her chair back and rearranges Min's table by the bed. Min has closed her eyes. Vivian touches Min's hand as she begins to leave.*

**Vivian:** See you next week.

**Min opens her eyes and raises her hand for a childish wave.**

## SCENE II

*Same room. Min and Henrietta are arranged as they were at the same time the previous week.*

**Henrietta:** Have you been thinking about your walk?

**Min:** Oh, Hen. You don't think she's really serious, do you? I can't walk. Even with her holding me up. She's not that big.

**Henrietta:** Nevertheless, she's the therapist.

**Min:** *My* therapist.

**Henrietta:** Very well. *Your* therapist.

**Min:** Well, you have your own.

**Henrietta:** I do?

**Min:** Your psychiatrist. Good old Miss Twist.

**Henrietta:** All right. **Henrietta's voice tries to caution Min to leave this subject alone.**

**Min:** You'll never find me talking to one of *those* therapists.

**Henrietta:** Nor would I want you to.

**Min, after a moment's silence:** What kind of a life do you think she has?

**Henrietta:** Who?

**Min:** My Miss Heart.

**Henrietta:** I don't know.

**Min:** Well, what do you imagine?

**Henrietta:** I haven't tried to imagine.

**Min:** Let's do. What do we know?

**Henrietta:** She has brown hair, blue eyes, strong arms.

**Min:** Lovely brown hair . . . she likes a little poetry, but she hasn't tried to discipline her memory.

**Henrietta:** She's very democratic. She wants to know what you want.

**Min:** Yes, she's quite direct.

**Henrietta:** She hasn't let you get away with too much, yet.

**Min:** . . . didn't mind that I forgot my exercises.

**Henrietta:** She minded a little.

**Min:** Now, let's imagine what we don't know.

**Henrietta:** Why?

**Min:** Because we like her.

**Henrietta:** Whatever it is that you want to know, I suggest that you simply ask her. She'll be here in a minute.

**Min:** But Hen, that would be rude. We are not exactly on intimate terms with Miss Heart.

**Henrietta:** That's all right. Miss Turner says people are waiting for an invitation to disclose their lives.

**Min, squinching her mouth up:** Pooh on Miss Twist-Turner. She's not of my generation nor is she even of yours. I hope you don't allow her to be rude to you by asking of our life.

**Henrietta:** She's quite charming, not rude at all . . . and I don't care to have any further discussion about her.

**Min:** Humph. *She crosses her arms on her chest and looks away from Henrietta who looks out the window. They sneak lateral glances at each other from time to time. Min looks at her watch, then at the ceiling. The doorbell rings and Henrietta begins to move very slowly to get up and answer the door.*

**Min, pleading:** Please, Hen. I doubt that Miss Heart cares for waiting in the hall so long.

**Henrietta:** I'm going. I'm sure she'll wait.

**Henrietta and Vivian enter.**

**Vivian:** Hello.

**Min:** Hello. Do move the table and pull up your chair.

**Vivian:** How are you?

**Min:** Fine. Your promptness is appreciated by all present. *Looking to Henrietta with a plea for a truce:* Isn't that so, Henrietta?

**Henrietta:** Yes, I suppose so.

**Vivian moves the card table back from the bed, then reaches the walker which is standing behind a variety of sickroom items including a commode chair and a wheelchair which sit unused. She stands the walker beside Min's bed.**

**Vivian:** I thought we'd start with our walk first today rather than tiring you with the exercises.

**Min:** But you just got here. Please, sit down for a minute, and catch your breath.

**Vivian, standing with one foot on the rung of the walker:** Oh, I'm fine. Did you decide not to get dressed?

**Min:** I did not give the idea further consideration once you expressed willingness to take me as I am. What would I wear, anyway? I'm sure I've outgrown all of my clothes . . . don't you think so, Hen?

**Henrietta:** I'll be glad to help you try some on, if you like.

**Min:** I've grown quite plump in this time of lollygagging in bed. *She pats her belly.* If I don't die soon, I'll require a special coffin.

**Vivian:** I don't think you should plan on dying soon.

**Min:** Well, what do you suggest then?

**Vivian:** A diet, if you really want your old shape back.

**Min:** Dreadful idea . . . **Henrietta.** **Min** looks to **Henrietta** and finds her not looking up from the puzzle. Please, Miss Heart and I are trying to have a conversation with you about clothing. Would you mind putting aside that crossword puzzle?

**Henrietta:** I do mind, but I shall do so. *Placing it on the window sill, she shifts to direct her attention to Min.*

**Min:** Now, the question is: Do you think my old shape is worth striving for?

**Henrietta:** I think your old shape was admirable, but I doubt you would be willing to give up your current indulgences to regain it.

**Min, chuckling:** Oh Hen, you do think of everything. And of course you are right. It has been such a long time since I've been strapped into one of those restricting undergarments.

**Vivian:** What do you mean?

**Min:** A brassiere. Actually it's quite a nice word for such a horrid contraption.

**Vivian:** You could go without one.

**Min, amused:** I would be . . . flopsy.

**Vivian:** So what.

**Min:** So what. Hen, Vivian says so what if I'm flopsy. She doesn't mind.

**Vivian:** Let's get ready for your walk. Let's sit you up with your feet over the side of the bed here. **Vivian** puts an arm around **Min's** shoulders and helps her to the full sitting position: Bring your legs over. *She helps her legs.*

**Min, to Henrietta:** She's quite bossy. *To Vivian:* There's no rush. I'll just sit here a minute.

**Vivian:** Have you been doing that every day?

**Min:** Yes, I think we did it every day.

**Vivian:** Did you get dizzy?

**Min:** No. Was I supposed to?

**Vivian:** Not necessarily. I thought you might because your circulation is not used to having your legs down.

**Min:** Does that mean I have good circulation?

**Vivian:** Yes, your circulation's fine. In fact I think, generally, you have a strong constitution.

**Min, smiling, pleased with the compliment:** Thank you, Vivian.

**Vivian:** You're welcome . . . What shoes are you going to wear?

**Min:** **Henrietta,** what do you think? Do I have any shoes I can wear?

**Henrietta, going to the closet:** I'll get your slippers. They're quite sturdy. *She brings them out and holds them up for Vivian to evaluate.* Are they suitable?

**Vivian:** They'll do just fine.

**Min:** I feel that my feet are about to suffer a loss of freedom, but at least not to shoes. **Vivian** leans over and puts them on **Min's** feet.

**Vivian:** Okay?

**Min:** I suppose.

**Vivian:** I guess we're ready to go. *She places the walker in front of Min.*

**Min, nervously:** I don't think I can. Perhaps we should just do the exercises.

**Vivian:** No, let's give it a try. You won't fall. I'll support you.

**Min, with her back to Henrietta:** Hen, are you prepared to watch me walk with this thing?

**Henrietta:** Yes, Min. I am ready to give you my full attention and to help Miss Heart, if necessary.

**Vivian, going to Min's side and putting an arm under hers and the other around her back:** Now bend forward so your weight is over your knees and then straighten up.

**Min, remaining in the same position:** But dear, my knees are not so good. I don't think I'll be able to do this. I am Miss Weak Knees.

**Vivian:** Just try. You can push with your arms on the walker at the same time.

**Min moves slightly forward.** Okay. Let's go on three. One . . . two . . . up. *They both struggle and gradually Min comes to her full height.*

**Vivian:** Wow, you're tall.

**Min:** You're a shrimp.

**Vivian:** How do you feel?

**Min:** Silly. Why should this seem such a radically different perspective? I'm not sure I like it. **Henrietta comes around to look at Min from the front.** How do you like me standing up, Hen?

**Henrietta:** You look as if you are surprising yourself, my dear.

**Min, frightened, to Vivian:** I don't know why I've agreed to this. I'd make a terrible mess on the floor. You'd have to get that bulldozer to scoop me up and drop me back in bed.

**Vivian, calmly:** You're doing just fine. Now move the walker a little ahead, then step up to it. *She tries to help Min move the walker but nothing happens.*

**Min:** I'm stuck. It doesn't go.

**Vivian:** You have to take your weight off it. Balance on your legs. Then lift it.

**Min:** Oh. *Testing, she lifts the walker for a brief second and puts it back in the same place.* Gads, this is worse than infancy.

**Vivian:** That's right. Next time move it forward. **Min does so and follows with two steps.**

**Vivian:** Excellent.

**Min:** Can I rest now?

**Vivian:** It would take you too much effort to get back up again. Let's just go forward.

**Min:** Have we decided where I'm going?

**Vivian:** Onward as far as you can.

**Min:** But I ought to have a destination, don't you think?

**Henrietta, watching with hands on hips, indulging Min with her voice:** If you wish one, I think you should choose it.

**Min:** Thank you, I will. Let's aim for the living room.

**Vivian:** Fine. I can bring the wheelchair to you if you tire anywhere along the way. Lift the walker . . . that's right. **Min advances slowly forward, her full concentration on the mechanics involved.** **Henrietta backs down the hall with her eyes on Min.** *As they enter the living room, Min stops and surveys the room. Tears form in her eyes.*

**Min, to Henrietta:** I thought you might have changed it around.

**Henrietta:** Without your permission?

**Min:** I had never exactly expected to return to this room in my lifetime.

**Vivian:** Why not?

**Min:** Because I don't think I'll be around much longer. *Explosively:* At least I should hope not . . . *Affectionately:* And because I hadn't anticipated having such a bossy therapist.

**Vivian:** I don't understand why you keep thinking you're going to die.

**Min:** We all must, eventually, you know.

**Vivian:** Of course . . . but I'll bet you've got a good ten years ahead of you.

**Min:** Easy for you to say . . . at your age. I would rather just get it over with. I'm tired.

**Vivian:** Where do you want to sit?

**Henrietta, standing behind a wingback chair which has a small hassock at its side:** This is Min's chair.

**Min:** Yes, that was my chair.

**Vivian:** Okay, let's walk straight across to there.

**Min:** Would you mind if I pass by the poets on the way . . . just over there. *She indicates a bookcase with her head. The bookcase is on a long wall lined with books from the floor to shoulder height.*

**Vivian:** All right. **To Henrietta:** Would you mind moving that rug?

**Henrietta, rolling up the braided rug:** Surely.

**Min begins to walk and again there is silence while all concentrate on her steps. When they reach the bookcase, she bends over and scans the shelves, turning her head slowly back and forth.**

**Min, to Vivian:** See?

**Vivian:** Yes. It's a lovely collection.

**Min, blowing on the bindings nearest her:** My poets are dusty.

**Vivian:** Yes.

**Min:** Guess what?

**Vivian:** What?

**Min:** Miss Weak Knees is about to drop.

**Vivian:** Let's head for the chair. Can you make it to the chair? **Min struggles and grunts but does not answer. She reaches the chair.**

**Vivian:** Go a little past. That's right. Now, turn so your legs are up against the chair. **Min maneuvers.** Good. Now you're going to reach back with that arm and hold the arm of the chair, then bend at the waist. **Min starts to follow instructions, then buckles and drops into the chair.**

**Min:** Whew. *She puts her head back and closes her eyes. Vivian moves the walker away, returns and takes Min's pulse. Henrietta stands, looking down on Min proudly.*

**Henrietta:** I believe this calls for a celebration.

**Min, still slightly out of breath:** Oh, do you really think so, Hen. I agree. Do you, Vivian?

**Vivian:** Absolutely.

**Min, triumphantly:** Then you'll have a drink with us?

**Vivian, obviously conflicted:** What kind of a drink?

**Min:** We do not offer a great deal of choice. We drink rye and water.

**Vivian:** Well, I really shouldn't drink when I'm working. I'll be glad to have soda or even just water while you have your drink.

**Min, disappointed:** I wish you would join us. We can't have a proper celebration without everyone's full cooperation.

**Vivian:** All right . . . a short one.

**Min, perking up:** We always have short ones. **Smiling at Henrietta:** Did you hear, Hen? She'll have one. It will be our pleasure, will it not?

**Henrietta:** Indeed it will. I'll make the drinks. *She goes to the china cabinet for three glasses, then off to the kitchen.*

**Min**, *indicating the settee opposite her chair*: You sit right over there, Vivian.

**Vivian** *sits and they look at each other and both smile shyly in the silence.*

**Min**: So, Vivian . . . you think that I shall live.

**Vivian**: Yes, Min.

**Min**: Do you know the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay?

**Vivian**: No.

**Min**: Perhaps you would enjoy them if you did. *Reciting*:

I know a hundred ways to die.

I've often thought I'd try one:

Lie down beneath a motor truck

Some day when standing by one.

Or throw myself from off a bridge—

Except such things must be

So hard upon the scavengers

And men that clean the sea

I know some poison I could drink.

I've often thought I'd taste it.

But mother bought it for the sink,

And drinking it would waste it.

**Vivian**, *smiling*: I enjoyed that.

**Henrietta**, *entering with the drinks on a tray and a small bowl of peanuts, goes first to Min*: My dear.

**Min**: Oh, no, let's serve our Miss Heart first. She's company. **Henrietta** *goes to Vivian with the tray, hands her a drink and places a coaster on the table beside her.*

**Vivian**: Thank you.

**Henrietta**: You're most welcome. *She returns to Min and hands her a drink and coaster, then places the third coaster on a table beside her chair and leaves her drink there while returning to the kitchen with the tray. Vivian begins to bring her drink to her mouth but Min stops her by clucking.*

**Min**: We shall commence as soon as Henrietta returns.

**Vivian**, *embarrassed*: Of course.

**Henrietta**, *taking her seat and raising her glass*: What shall we toast, Min?

**Min**, *raising her glass with gaiety*: To my hearty constitution. Vivian says I have one.

**Henrietta**: I think Vivian is quite right. To your hearty constitution.

**Vivian**: And to your fine memory.

**Min**: And to my therapist who is slightly dismayed at the idea that I don't mind the bed pan.

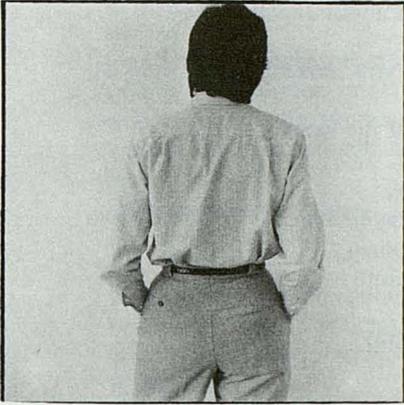
**Henrietta**, *withdrawing her glass from the toast*: Enough. *They all drink. Min sighs deeply and rests back in the chair.*

**Min**: So tell me, Vivian . . . what would you like to be doing that you aren't able to do now?

**Vivian**, *looks to Henrietta for protection or help. Henrietta has about her a look of satisfaction, awaits Vivian's answer with interest*: With my life?

**Min**: Yes, of course.

# POETRY



*Bad Attitude*



*Sum 79*

## OUTSIDE/INSIDE

we've flattened  
grasses by hundreds;  
holding blanket, bottle, the weight  
of weeks apart—  
we knew what we'd come  
for; still in jeans  
we've clutched & rubbed &  
hadn't asked the landscape;  
but we've also rolled  
in side,  
unexpectedly naked,  
surprised to find ourselves  
where sweet stems rise  
from hardwood,  
a kind of gardening  
that compensates

—Lise Iwon

## THIS IS MY IMAGINATION

This is my imagination  
Women who very simply want each other,  
both walk with hands in pockets.  
Both are thin  
spare women who very simply  
very simply want their eyes toward their own knees while they walk.  
They talk with such little guard as boys about Japan.  
When one speaks to the other  
wistful she asks Do you remember Do you remember  
an old and celebrated crone  
walking to one woman who loves her all the same.  
Morning water gathers on their shoes  
coloring them a shade grayer, no darker.  
An old and celebrated crone Dawn is grayer than the prayer of two  
thin women. The prayer of two thin women  
who walk and walk and they are not about to break.  
Hear the birds begin to clatter  
The prayer of two thin women is pale gray.

—P. L. Press

## HIKE

Out  
on the trail the second morning  
we come to fresh droppings  
black turds coiled in the sun  
I bend down  
squinting  
into the eyes of the children  
wanting them to pierce  
the riddle, read  
the trail  
of whatever  
has walked here before them.  
“It looks like . . .”  
“It looks like . . .”  
  
“It looks like shit,” they say  
and move up the path  
wondering  
what it was  
I wanted to tell  
them.

## STARTING TO REMEMBER

Last night

I dreamed that  
you and I had  
words: Cyprian

—*Sappho*

On Tuesday  
night at the same moment, sitting  
in different cities at different desks  
we wrote  
long letters to each other in the same  
tongue. A common understanding—  
words, paragraphs, syntax  
knowledge imparted and received. We  
interface, a living  
and triumphant dialogue composed  
instantaneously.

I dream us attempting this  
before our human languages  
were learned and possessed forever  
in that neural cavity  
using something older  
more valuable with which to light  
the first light feel  
the first pleasure.

The two of us before language  
or without language  
having just been born  
the small beginning.

In the huge beginning before  
my English. Before your Greek.  
I dream us searching for words  
we haven't learned, feelings  
we only dream together. I dream  
it is you who feels that first  
quick pleasure with me.

I dream you writing to me in  
early, pre-Sapphic Greek. I dream  
I understand or started to  
remember.

—*Kim Vaeth*

## JUST GOOD FRIENDS

Kay was waiting for the bus  
her suitcase a week early going home

and Donna is explaining  
covering this break in their behavior  
“Kay’s not socially secure  
she doesn’t meet new people easily  
but I do and when she hangs  
onto me, it’s awkward  
I get irritable

I got angry  
she decided it would be best to go home”

she was leaving  
I stopped, utterly surprised  
they’d quarreled, I knew that  
but days ago

they had come in together to the first class  
wearing corduroys and wool shirt-jackets  
not definitive, but promising

I watched  
they were always together  
I ate dinner with them  
heard about their husbands, children  
time they spent and trips  
they took together, frequently  
I tried to get to know them  
they knew each other so well  
in their conversation there were layers  
of private meanings which Kay  
would dismiss, explain away  
I could make no defensible assumptions  
they were just always together

they announced together they had quarreled  
to all appearances the clash  
had been resolved, routines continued  
Kay was waiting for the bus

was saying  
"both strong personalities  
amazing to have stayed friends for three years  
we have recurrent conflicts, they blow over  
this should too if I go home, don't worry  
we'll still be good friends"

be just good friends  
though clearly those words are not adequate  
cannot be trusted to maintain when Kay  
and Donna are not physically together  
the relationship that seems so  
obvious when they are

they quarreled again  
up against it—there are words  
that could have carried  
that would have acknowledged  
conveyed the significance  
they even know the words

but that those words more accurately  
describe their situation, that this tension  
that explodes in intimate violence over  
some excuse is not appropriate  
if you're truly just good friends

it's not safe even to think of such things  
they have interpreted, explained  
the quarrel away as a familiar  
clash of personalities between friends

—Claudia Scott

## TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT HERE

### I. THERAPY

*you don't trust me enough*

You snapped off the lights  
handed me coffee  
and settled into your leather chair  
giving me your profile  
trying to watch by acting  
indifferent.

*there is no evidence  
your mother ever loved you*

I covered my legs with my skirt  
so you would not notice I had skin  
would not guess it was warm,  
that I breathed, had any  
particular name. I did not like  
to weight the air with words  
in the carefully dimmed  
place where silence listened  
for me.

*I told your parents  
what you said about your body*

In the years since then  
I have heard the absence  
in afternoons, my head shaping  
the air around it, my eyes looking  
into sky, ears hearing until  
I shout *Get away you bastard!*  
at words you left coming  
to life.

*what you learn here will talk  
to you through the years*

So you still sit somewhere  
in a dim cube with a woman  
who will not lie down  
and close her eyes  
who does not tell her name  
whom you do not trust  
enough.

—Susan Wood-Thompson

## FEVER

A girl of six, drenched, throws the covers off.  
Her parents, old and country, pack them back  
around her. Feebly in the evening she plays  
cards with her aunt, waiting for the little  
red marks to go.

Hearts and diamonds fade,  
tonight she cannot read the cards, tonight  
she learns silence, what it looks like forever  
behind her head.

Crafty-eared, she hears  
her mother cry, head in apron in the kitchen,  
crying out the child who has stopped stirring in her,  
whose eyes burned out. Crying guilt that has no origin,  
no name.

The child knows. Because the old man  
used to come and touch her with that thing  
inside her pants, inside her brain, to tell  
her forever she's a bad girl: Good girls  
don't have that happen to them. Good girls don't  
go blind.

The child knows God sees everything.

—Susan Wood-Thompson

## LIVING TILL NINETY

Leslie Robillard, May 31, 1887—June 1, 1977

For Leslie Robillard whom I  
never knew except in the distant  
last day of her life. I adjusted  
her in that bed, rubbed her back  
saw the folds of all her skin  
rumped like a tired accordion.  
During the bath she lay curiously  
exposed, vulnerable to my whims  
to the very air cut off from her  
by the pale green oxygen mask.  
The IV in her arm, the feeding tube  
in her nose dripped sustenance.  
A foley catheter drained dark amber  
urine, the bag warm as a cow's full  
udder, holding her life's final  
expression. At 12:40 she ceased  
to breathe her face turned upward.  
Her death happened without obvious  
drama and her sister told me  
she had wanted only  
to live to ninety.

Leslie Robillard whom I  
never knew had been unconscious for weeks unaware  
of days passing of hands  
that felt her body bathed  
the warm skin, dry as an old apple,  
inserted tubes in every orifice,  
ran IV's as a matter of course. Who  
never spoke a word, only breathed  
as best she could until the 90th  
year passed like a cloud over her bed.  
Who knew, whose body knew  
of her coming of age like a cloud  
that parted to the distant air.

—Rachel deVries

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HATE AND LOVE

The real difference between hate and love is love is when they love you back hate is when you think they should but they don't ever heard of the phrase killer queer? A woman I know (rather hard) has a fondness for other sweet young women but she usually treats them like shit because she thinks they won't love her back she feels betrayed by her own vulnerability her weakness toward the fair sex those boy crazy tramps.

So I told her I strutted my stuff let it all hang out until she got the picture (finally) Baby if you want me I'm yours she was so surprised she nearly bit through her cigarette (Salem lights) no one I suppose had ever responded before what deprivation and yet people (women) must go through it every day dying by turns like a chicken on a grill at Horn and Hardart's take out.

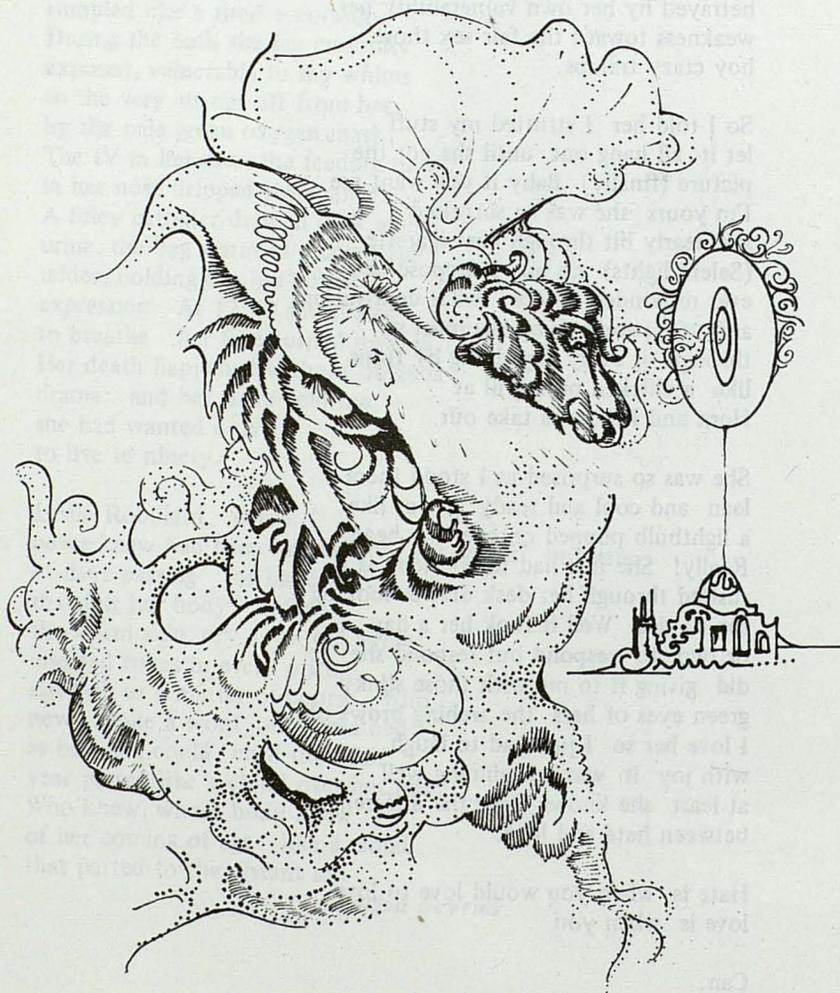
She was so surprised as I stood there lean and cool and ready it was like a lightbulb popped on over her head. Really! She just had to consider as I rustled through her desk drawer looking for staples. Well it took her a day or two to respond but respond she did giving it to me with those slinky green eyes of hers the arching brows oh I love her so I just had to laugh with joy it was a beginning well at least she knows now the difference between hate and love.

Hate is when you would love to love  
love is when you

Can.

—Ruth A. Rouff

# REVIEWS



*Drawing by Gail Runté Piland*

“LISTEN, THERE’S A STORY FOR YOU . . . ”

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A review of *Retreat as It Was* by Donna J. Young, The Naiad Press, 7800 West-side Dr., Weatherby Lake, Missouri, 64152, 120 pp., \$5.00 (+ \$1 postage).

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In *Literary Women* Ellen Moers notes that nineteenth-century women writers’ insistent presentation of public acclaim for female genius in their fiction is due to “the impossibility of ever having” [it] “in real life” and that the embarrassingly “raw fantasy” of such scenes comes from having been “starved for centuries.”<sup>1</sup>

*Retreat: As It Was!* by Donna J. Young is a heartbreaking non-book, although with training—especially someone to stand over her, yelling “Details!” every time she drifts into summary—she might eventually become some sort of writer. *Retreat* was written out of sheer starvation, published ditto (unless we’re to believe that Naiad is simply being opportunistic), and will be read for no other reason, if it’s read at all.

Ostensibly science fiction, *Retreat*’s science comes from incoherently bad television; it’s a mixture of faster-than-light communications and spacedrive, inexplicably endless sources of light and power, and no other method of transporting the wounded from a grounded spaceship to a provincial settlement than “pack animals” (with “spines” but otherwise undescribed), a grueling six-or-seven-day, hypothermia-inducing journey which looks bafflingly like a rather Darwinian version of triage. Since the wounded receive only psionic healing (the women disdaining such primitive devices as bandages, food, water, antibiotics, etc.), why not send the healers *to* the ship? But *Retreat* mystifies all its technology. Here are the book’s only descriptions of technological activity, quoted entire:

The room she entered contrasted to [sic] the rustic simplicity of the post. Instead of cave-like walls and fur-lined floors,<sup>2</sup> there were gadgets and square corners, levers and dials, hard stone underfoot. Lita, Tulla, Ain, and a few others were gathered around a console, making calculations. [12]

They turned and began the process of tuning the complicated machinery to the biological rhythms that were Ria’s alone. First Lita placed her hand on a yellow, translucent square. She brushed her other hand over a series of colored plates to the left of the yellow square. Ria laid her hand down on the square next to Lita’s and pressed the same plates in reverse order to Lita’s. Lita then removed both hands from the console. [14]

The walls of the central room had been energized into multi-dimensional [sic] representations of various sectors of the known universe. Women were busy entering data, making changes in this diagram or that, running multitudes of machines and equipment. [76]

And here is *Retreat*'s description of the cosmic disaster that ruins the women's sophisticated technology, leaves them vulnerable to the new crop of (mutation-induced) male children, transforms the fourth planet into the asteroid belt (I think) and proves that we've been on earth all the time, thus validating that "jaguar" on page 1 (the book otherwise refers vaguely only to "large predatory beasts"):

... they were thrown to the ground. The earth shivered beneath them and roared in agony. The force of the vibrations rolled Ria and Mar across the open space, into each other and finally against another boulder. The buildings collapsed. The pyramid shook. Women inside the buildings screamed in panic.

The quake died down, but another rolled in right behind it. Ria tried to regain her feet and fell again. The second shock ended soon, but the pyramid suffered more damage. Finally, only small vibrations rattled through the Post and Ria could stand. [90-91]

If I quote from *Retreat* at such length it's because I want to convey as forcefully as possible the absolute, limp, thinness of the book; not only is there no science, no government, and no economics here, as well as barely any visualizable scenery or people characterologically distinguishable from one another, but Young's avoidance of concrete detail seems at times to amount to deliberate policy. Thus we have such annoying vaguenesses as "refreshments" [73], "a steaming herb drink" [71], "nutrient cubes" [98], and "small portions of various foods" [39], plus "a richly aromatic mug of liquid" [87]—I suspect the author means that the liquid is aromatic, not the mug, but that still doesn't tell us what the stuff tastes like. Young's ear is so leaden that she can flood *Retreat* with saidbookisms (like "'Ha-ha-ha-ha-ho,' Ain laughed"—p. 42) and barbarisms like "younglings" (children) and "the Mystery of Parthenogen" (pregnancy) or indicate one educated Sister's provinciality by having her say "I dunno" [62] and the other's sophisticated ease by "I wouldn't want to enslave a sister to an unhealthy emotional attachment" [63]. But these remarks aren't characterizations since everybody on *Retreat* is like everyone else, totally Good, Harmonious, Loving, and Non-erotic save for two who fall in love at first sight but don't get it on until they want to reproduce (or at all thereafter), a piece of Christian-Fundamentalist prudery of which the author seems unaware.

What is the book about? Hugging, I think. Thirty-nine (non-erotic) hugs and seventeen incidents of weeping occur in one hundred and six pages, which averages out to one hug per 2.7 pages, one weep every 9.4 pages, and one of either (if you're not picky) every 1.9 pages. Unhappily visible under the surface of this story is an all-female commune in which everyone lives on welfare or child-support, in which there is a little child-care (but no messy diapers), a little herbal medicine, a little massage, a little yoga, no sex unless you are In Love, and a lot of that amorphous, judgment-less, uncritical, and ultimately meaningless "emotional support" which all too often passes among women for real love or real respect. And of course nobody shops, cooks, cleans, earns money, or has any idea of the enormous and complicated organism that is the modern industrial world, or ever quarrels, including the children, who always play "quietly and gently" [19]. Seldom have traditional female limitations been so painfully insisted upon in a piece of fiction. Naiad

has done neither Young nor us a favor by printing *Retreat*. I can't imagine any positive reaction to the book from any reader whatever except a sobby-sentimental high followed by an equally slumpy anger against one's bedmates, housemates, and workmates for failing to live up to the book's saccharine ideality. Young (bemusedly, in her nightgown) has wandered out in the woods to toast endless, gluey marshmallows over the same fire that good-humored, shrewd Sally Gearhart, author of *Wanderground*<sup>3</sup> (in her L. L. Bean boots and down jacket) is using to heat her can of Trail Mix—supposed to be good for you but people really like it because it's full of sweet stuff like raisins and coconut. I am one of *Wanderground's* godmothers and thus entitled to call Gearhart the Edgar Rice Burroughs of Lesbian Feminism (thus implying that she has both the defects and the considerable virtues of the creator of John Carter of Mars), but at least *Wanderground* has individualized characters and a sharp sense of the various kinds of hell nature can throw at you when she's in the mood.

But who is this on the third side of the fire—this noonday to Gearhart's sturdy Eveready flashlight and Young's druggy candle—this giant who is using the fire not to ruin our taste buds or distract our desperate minds with magical impossibilities but to hammer out tools for the future: ploughshares, hunting knives—and look, there's even a mold for a telescope mirror in the center of the ashes!

The Titan with the forge is *Motherlines*, by Suzy McKee Charnas,<sup>4</sup> a book that sank like a stone in hard-cover publication a year ago (where were you all! Asleep? On Mars? Oh, woe!) and is now out in Berkeley paperback with a cover as unjustly dull as Tee Corinne's cover for *Retreat* is unjustly seductive. Charnas knows exactly what her characters eat and wear and use and what they have to do to get it and what happens to them if they don't, and that's rock-bottom political awareness if any ever existed. From the East Coast state of Holdfast (after World War Three) in which all women are the chattel slaves of all men, the runner Alldera escapes, to be rescued by the free Amazons, the Riding Women of the plains. There are also the Free Fems, a community of other escaped slaves, and all Charnas' people are unforgettable, from pretty Daya (a "pet fem" until a master skewered her cheeks with a hot stick) who makes stories and trouble out of the same imaginative hunger, to wise, wealthy, tongueless Elnoa, boss of the Free Fems, too fat to leave the wicker wagons the fems pull, endlessly keeping "her accounts" (as they think) until she tells Daya in sign language—in one of the book's most moving scenes—that *she is writing history* because the world must never forget what they suffered, to the eccentric loner-artist Fedaka, healer and cloth-dyer, whose only lover is the Fems' god, Moonwoman. Among the parthenogenetic Riding Women are graceful, black, wise, quarrel-solving Nenisi Conon, who spends half her life in sullen fury because "My horse-farting teeth *hurt!*" and loud, crude, red-faced, dumb Barvaran, whose death is the great grief of the book, and crazy Grays Omelly who senses the collision of values the Free Fems bring before anyone else and so stands on one leg within strange rings of objects for hours "to keep things in their place."

Charnas doesn't tell you; she shows you, from the authentic eeriness of the Moonwoman legends to Alldera's becoming the reluctant George Washington

of her people, capitulating to others' logic ("It [the Holdfast] was built on our backs"), leading sixty armed women back to the Holdfast, where men may still rule:

"Listen, here's a story for you:" [says Daya] "we are a small, grim army drawn up on some high path on the far side of the mountains, looking out in silence . . . over our country, green to the horizon line of the sea. . . ." [251]

And here is the Fems' bitter "self-song":

"Wash all clean, black sea, roll stones,  
Break walls, salt sand, spare none . . .  
We breathed earth all our generations.  
We can breathe an ocean of dead men and not care." [233]

Listen, there's a story for you. . . . *A real one.*  
Read it.

#### NOTES

1. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1977, p. 278.
2. No one does any house-keeping in this book, even where details like furry floors suggest a lot of potential for mess.
3. Sally Gearhart, *Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women*, Persephone Press, Watertown, Mass., 1978.
4. Suzy McKee Charnas, *Motherlines*, Berkeley, N.Y., 1979.

## conditions: five the black women's issue

Available August, 1979

*Conditions* is a magazine of women's writing with an emphasis on writing by lesbians. *Conditions: Five* is an issue devoted entirely to writing by Black women, guest edited by Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith.

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“TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND BE KNOWN”

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A review of *To Know Each Other and Be Known: Women's Writing Workshops* by Beverly Tanenhaus; Out & Out Books, 70pp. (Order from: The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY 14886, \$3.50 + 75¢ postage); *Notes of a Daughter from the Old Country* by Melanie Perish, Motherroot Publications, 214 Dewey St., Pittsburgh, PA 15218, 14pp., \$1.75; *Speaking in Sign: Poems* by Terri Anderson, West End Press, Box 697, Cambridge, MA 02139; 32pp., write for price.

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From June 1976 to June 1977 three women met in conservative, insular Williamsburg, Virginia to talk feminist politics and poetry. As I slogged through the rain to these meetings, I felt exploratory and frightened. Afterwards, I walked home hearing and re-hearing in exhilaration the most compelling words we had said and written. Together we forged a path, random and sure. When the year ended, I began a year of no paid work, writing in South Carolina. But before going, I took off for Oneonta, New York, having answered an ad for members for Beverly Tanenhaus' Women's Writing Workshop. I drove to the mountains in deadly earnest, in the faith that I could wrest from this workshop the women's writing community I knew I had to have much more of, and figured to exist somewhere. For two weeks I had daily two-hour criticism classes, another meeting with fewer women, where we criticized writing by each daily, and in the evenings women gave informal readings. It was a wonderful springboard for a year working alone—but not quite alone because a number of us exchanged poems by mail during the next year, and generated the surest sense of feminist writing community and audience I have ever known. Among these women were Beverly Tanenhaus, Melanie Perish, and Terri Anderson. In the last two years, each has published her first book.

My lasting impression of Beverly's *To Know Each Other and Be Known: Women's Writing Workshops* is the articulateness of its principal author. (I say "principal" because Beverly "collaborates" by quoting extensively the poems and comments of workshop participants and guest writers.) Beverly is a poet, critic; teacher, and in the workshop these roles coalesce. She is hands-down the best classroom critic I have seen. She writes, "My contribution is not to tell a woman everything I know about her work, but to figure out what I know about her work that she can use." Beverly succeeds in eliciting the same useful criticism from workshop members. Her combination of sensitivity toward and respect for each writer is powerful. The sensitivity, as Beverly speaks for all women:

Being candid and a woman involves risk. At the very least, I may be met with disbelief or plain confusion. At the worst, I may be punished for my insight. Because of fear of retaliation or estrangement from people I love, perhaps I will limit my perceptions; I will not let myself know as much as I might under more supportive circumstances. Our community may very well determine the parameters of our wisdom. 93

To help the workshop community stretch the parameters of each member's wisdom, Beverly runs a feminist classroom that includes these signs of respect, culled from the many which her book elucidates:

—Every woman determined for herself what work she would present to the class; as a teacher, I'm comfortable dealing with any piece that the writer takes seriously.

—No one was allowed to state a one-dimensional pejorative reaction to work, since 'I hate it' or even 'I love it' would leave the writer helpless to evaluate response. Each critical comment had to be supported by specific reasoning.

—The writer agreed to remain silent until we had finished our critique of her work....This method allowed us to explore multiple perspectives without being short-circuited by the author's explanations.

These strategies promote constructive ways for authors to learn about their work. As a member of Beverly's class, I was most impressed by the exploration of "multiple perspectives" mentioned above. For instance, Beverly might ask the group to identify the literal setting in the first stanza of a woman's poem. If four different interpretations were forthcoming, the author would learn as painlessly as possible that her stanza was ambiguous, and could decide to use or eliminate the ambiguity.

I am moved by Beverly's insights into the women she works with, and into herself. (In fact, my only problem in reading the book lies in the occasional redundancy between her own and collaborators' comments, and an occasional proliferation of collaborators' comments to the extent of breaking the fast pace and sure direction of Beverly's insights.) Some of her remarks especially reflect honesty and willingness to "be known" in the book. She describes, for example, one complexity she and every creative writing teacher I know struggles with: "If, as the teacher, I emerged as an expert in taking other people's writing perhaps more seriously than my own, I too flourished in the community's powerful affirmation of me as an individual."

It is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to criticize the book without criticizing the workshops—to attend one is to feel strongly about it. Each workshop lasts two weeks and refracts the personalities and writing skills of the women there. Fortunately, women tend to come when ready to change to a fuller commitment in their writing—this is exciting to be in on. A generosity of give-and-take moves among the women. In experiencing the serious attention her work receives from the others, each learns how to take it more seriously for herself. Many then publish as they never have before. I am no longer surprised, but always happy, to open a feminist journal and find writing by one, two, or three workshop women. Best of all has been the appearance of Beverly's book, and the chapbooks by two poets who were already writing very strong poetry at the 1977 workshop, and before.

Melanie Perish's *Notes of a Daughter from the Old Country* gives an overall impression of decorum: each aspect matches some other. The first and last poems, for instance, frame the book by describing the generations of Yugoslavian women in the speaker's mother's family. This is especially fitting in a book where every poem deals, one way or another, with a woman's reflection—in her ancestors, students, or even in her choice of possessions. The two middle poems take place in the immediate family home on "Satur-

day Morning” and “Sunday Afternoon.” This sense of order pervades all aspects of the book.

The first poem begins with the oval image of the poet’s fingernails, and the last oval shapes of the great-great-grandmother’s body. In this last poem the reader’s familiarity with each woman is created from a set of related shapes: ovals for the first woman, braids and ropes for the second, followed by knots and tangles for the third. A passage from this poem illustrates Melanie’s gift for delineating textures, here heightened by particularly fine contrasts and an involvement of all five senses:

Practiced fingers  
cut the cord with a clean fish knife,  
knotted it tight with waxed string  
before she bathed the small body,  
wrapped it in cloth soft from boiling.

(“Notes of a Daughter from the Old Country”)

Melanie’s clarity of image is reflexive in this description of a friend’s possessions:

Thin fall light  
makes sharp shadows under her things,  
a blue glass pitcher,  
a wheel-thrown bowl,  
vessels that fill and keep and pour.

(“Rooms”)

A variation on reverberation among images and in relation to theme is clearly present in the last two lines of this section from “Kinship,” a poem dedicated to Beverly:

When you talk of anger  
plough down castles,  
turn over the prince,  
the princess dead in her sleep,  
the Russian mothers before you  
become your bones, your eyes,  
your black hair.  
I see you planting,  
breaking ground.

The only poem in which I do not find this effect is “Saturday Morning,” and this is the only poem in the book that I do not find transcending its subject matter. But in her characteristically strong similes and metaphors—that usually become evident or gain impact at the end of a poem—Melanie has discovered, and developed to distinction, a feature of her own perception. Melanie’s subjects suddenly gain dimensions when she practices what I find to be her dominant approach to the poems in this book.

One of the most skillful instances of this technique occurs in “For the Young Women,” a lovely lesbian poem, in which the speaker recalls herself as a young woman filled with longing. In describing her beach-play as in-

fused with a quest to fulfill strong needs for as yet unnamed satisfaction, she implicitly clarifies the nature of what she wants:

At fifteen, sixteen  
I ate and lay and ran with them  
down to the tongue of the sea  
the white shoulders of her beach  
looking for names.

Finally, I want to point out that images of a poet's mother give a glimpse of early nourishment of this book's roots. For example, in "To Look at My Hands and See,"

I knew only the fingers  
that touched my back as I studied,  
held the books she read to me,  
that carefully turned the pages  
of everything I wrote.

This beautifully patterned book focuses my attention on the concision and control of art. Subject matter, tone, and technique are well-defined and harmonious among themselves. Melanie lives in Manhattan, a concentrated geographic area, and in this book with a geographic emphasis, I wonder about the relation of where she lives to the distinct shape of what she writes.

This particularly occurs to me in contrasting her work with Terri Anderson's *Speaking in Sign*, in which geography is also important. Terri has lived all her life in the Midwest and Southwest, and her poems emphasize diffusion made concrete in nature's wildness: wild weeds, fine dust, leaping points of fire. Like the amorphous borders of the Midwest, her book borders a broad range of subjects: desolation at the loss of family members, political outrage, sexual love for women and men, the Virgin Mary, celebration of strong women, surrealistic fantasies, the poet's role, and far more. Terri's poetic approaches are likewise varied, but many poems and the book as a whole transmit a strong sense of the tenuousness of emotional orientation in the flux, particularly the harsh demands, of nature. Here, in the opening and ending of "Our People" I find the fierce grip that the punishing, pungent countryside has on its inhabitants:

For more years than I can remember,  
the crops have failed  
in this land where rain is a fugitive;  
and the people in my blood have  
lived in houses cut from the earth.

Yet we have been more than survivors;  
all the best I will ever be  
lies rooted in the earth  
where my grandmother sleeps,  
on a prairie swept clean of trees,  
under a harsh, cloudless sky,  
where wheat flows in waves

over the first sod houses,  
and the dust of the dead  
sings under the blade of the plow.

Terri is a good observer with a range of ways to tell her stories and share her landscapes, but on rare occasions she uses a trite phrase (e.g. ending a poem with the line, "that is so good!") or burdens a description with redundant or otherwise lifeless adjectives (as in "intricate web"). These are, however, not characteristic, and usually the impression is of a mingling of sensations, some heard with a third ear, as in "the last long sigh of willows," and some achieved by association:

Your body was always a house  
freely offering its fragrance  
of wild mint and moss.  
("October")

Taken a bit further, the combination of nature with feelings about experiences with another person take a surreal form:

How many times did we find that  
place of tangled vines where  
our footsteps touched the earth,  
and in their wake grew the  
long, bending stalks of glass bells?  
Walking under the moon then,  
our bodies were curving strands of  
light visible only to the hundred  
eyes flashing in the branches overhead.  
("The Distant Light")

The unusual versatility of Terri's verse also includes public political events, as in "The Siege of the International Hotel," which documents the police's forcing Felix Ayson and others from the home they had worked hard to save. In one of her strongest endings, Terri concludes:

Before the demolition crews  
arrive in the morning,  
the children come back  
to stare at empty windows and doors  
barred by uniformed guards;  
somber and dark-eyed children  
who speak only in whispers  
and forget nothing at all.

In another poem about freedom, "Songs of the Deviant Sisters," Terri casts into words the opposition between those who uphold the patriarchy at all costs, and the women who turn backs on it:

We inject our hollow words  
with honey and liquid lead,  
but the weight of what  
remains unsaid falls through  
gaping wounds to the  
center of the earth  
where everything is  
molten and without form.  
("Where the False Word Ends")

Whatever subject Terri chooses, her poems are forceful, and her tone conveys particular authority when she describes the connections between people and an unyielding land, between people and the difficulty of establishing their freedom.

I have found that a good book, like a good poem, teaches me how to read it. All three books reviewed here benefit in this respect from the articulate, well-defined, and bold language the authors use. These are first books by women who have written steadily, learned a great deal about their writing, and who strengthen the women's community by publishing these books.

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**WOMEN'S WRITING WORKSHOPS: Poetry, Fiction, Playwriting**  
Beverly Tanenhaus, Director

2 Sessions: June 29–July 13 and July 27–Aug. 10, 1980

Staff: Joan Larkin, Sherry Redding

Guest Writers & Editors include: Judy Grahn, Adrienne Rich,  
Celeste West, and Elaine Gill

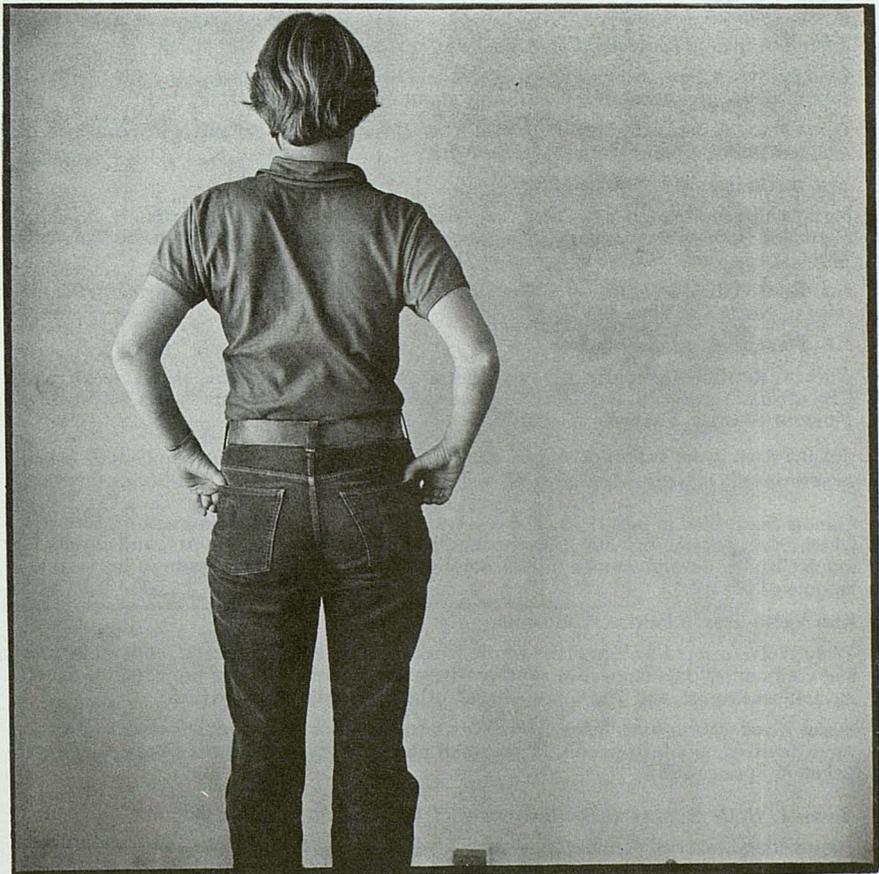
For more information write: PROGRAM OFFICE,  
Hartwick College  
Oneonta, New York 13820

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The National Women's Studies Association will hold its annual convention at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, from May 16–20, 1980. The planned program will include panels, seminars, and papers in feminist education and presentations in the arts. Participants can look forward to discussions of Women's Studies Programs in academic institutions and of feminist alternatives to traditional education. For further information, contact Elaine Reuben, Coordinator, NWSA, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

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# ETC.



*Bad Attitude*

*June 79*

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Maureen Brady** is the author of *Give Me Your Good Ear* and a cofounder of Spinsters, Ink.

**Linda J. Brown:** "I am: Black lesbian-feminist, an editor of *Azalea: a magazine by 3rd World Lesbians*, city witch-woman, member of the Jemima Writers' Collective."

**Rachel de Vries** helped form a new feminist press in Cazenovia, NY called The Wild Goose Press. They published her book, *An Arc of Light*. Her poems have appeared as well in several small magazines.

**J.Z. Grover:** "I started the series *Bad Attitude* because I was trying to sort out what there is about a woman's physical presentation that announces her as a dyke. Since I didn't want to involve myself with the whole question of what *faces* communicate, I thought I would photograph as many dyke-backs as I could to see what, if anything, they seemed to have in common."

**Pat Hynes** is an environmental engineer and a founder of Bread and Roses Restaurant.

**Lise Iwon** lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and teaches at a daycare center and an alternative high school.

**Peggy Kornegger** is a San Francisco writer and an associate editor of the new *Journal of Social Anarchism* from Baltimore.

**Anne Lee** lives in Pasadena, California.

**Beverly Lynch** was a frequent contributor to *The Ladder* in its last years. She is still trying to tell stories that make us cry and smile about ourselves.

**Linda Marie** is the author of *I Must Not Rock* (Daughters, 1977) and is working on a play adapted from Barbara Deming's *Prison Notes*.

**kmc minns** lives in Los Angeles.

**Maricla Moyano** lives in New York City. Her first book is titled, appropriately enough, *The Beginning Book* (Print Center, 1973). She is working on another (to be called *Middle Book*). Several of her articles have appeared in *Tribad*.

**Gail Runte Piland** is a professional artist, illustrator, and educator, now living in the mountains of North Carolina.

**P.L. Press** lives in San Francisco.

**Ruth A. Rouff:** "I am currently a prisoner of the corporation (doing clerical work in a CBS affiliate) and enjoying it less. I attended Vassar College for three years before dropping out to write. I have no regrets."

**Joanna Russ** is the author of several science fiction novels, including *The Female Man*. A new novel, *On Strike Against God*, will be published by Out and Out Books this year.

**Claudia Scott** died in late 1979. The editors of *SW* will miss her poems and her letters, which often pointed out our shortcomings, but which were always witty, and always very much Claudia. Several women in Philadelphia are exploring ways to publish her second volume of poetry.

**Kim Vaeth** lives in Fairfax, California.

**Terry Wolverton** is a lesbian artist whose work includes writing, theater, education, magic, and community organizing. She is currently involved with two large projects: the Incest Awareness Project, and The Great American Lesbian Art Show (GALAS).

**Susan Wood-Thompson:** "I teach writing workshops in Washington, DC on poetic structures, revision, and long poems. My book of poems, *Light through the Door*, will be published in Spring, 1980."

**Susan J. Wolfe** teaches at the University of South Dakota, in Vermillion.

**Judith Niemi** teaches a course on women & wilderness in Minneapolis and is a partner in Woodswoman, leading women on canoeing trips in the north woods.

## A-MAZING WORDSEARCH II: THE LESBIAN BODY

created by Julia Penelope

Based on Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, this puzzle contains 44 words that refer to the Lesbian anatomy. The words are listed below, and the first word, SPINE, has already been circled to get you started. As you find each word in the diagram, circle it and cross it out in the list.



cheeks  
pubis  
elbow  
hair  
knee  
toes  
eyes  
loins  
aorta  
viscera  
synapses  
nipples  
breasts  
pubis  
mammary  
brain  
pelvis

~~spine~~

urea

secretions

sweat

lymph

tongue

fingers

nails

temples

the bloods

forehead

mouth

lips

teeth

cunt

navel

legs

occiput

cervix

maw

vagina

vulva

jaw

nose

womb

Labia majora

Labia minora

**FOR HANDICAPPED READERS:**

*Sinister Wisdom* in conjunction with FEMINIST TAPING FOR HANDICAPPED READERS is making periodicals and books available to handicapped readers. At present the project consists of ten women volunteers who tape *Sinister Wisdom*, *Off Our Backs*, and *Feminary*. Since we would like to make these tapes available for no more than the cover price of the book or periodical itself, we are asking women to help us by donating some money (any amount) that could be used to subsidize this undertaking. Or to donate the equipment needed to do the tape processing ourselves: a cassette-to-cassette high speed duplicator, cassette records, and 90-minute cassette tapes.

If you know anyone who would like access to the journals we are taping, and is a handicapped reader—please tell them about FTHR. Donations should be made out to Susan Wood-Thompson and sent to her at FEMINIST TAPING FOR HANDICAPPED READERS, Box 6516, T Street Station, Washington, DC 20009.



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**DEADLINE: March 15, 1980**

**SW 15 — LESBIANS AND PORNOGRAPHY.** Guest edited by  
**Julia Penelope.** We are seeking poems, articles, and short stories  
that deal with any of the issues of pornography and violence and the  
ways in which these facets of patriarchal culture affect Lesbian lives,  
the way we define ourselves, our sexuality, our relationships with  
other wimmin, racism and pornography, classism and pornography,  
incest as a specific form of sexual violence in the lives of Lesbians, the  
"compromise" distinction between "pornography" and "erotica," the  
use of pseudo-Lesbian imagery in advertising (to whom do such ads  
appeal?). Also of interest, in contrast, would be articles and fiction that  
explore Lesbian sensuality as it is evolving now.

Address all correspondence and manuscripts (include an SASE)  
to

Julia Penelope  
box 30541

**DEADLINE: September 1, 1980**

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*Sinister Wisdom* welcomes submissions from black and Third World Lesbians. *Sinister Wisdom* welcomes unsolicited manuscripts and art work. Please type (double-spaced) all written work. Reviews should be no longer than 3500 words; articles no longer than 5000 words. Enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope and a 2-3 line description of yourself. At this time, we can pay only with copies of the issue in which your work appears. Send all manuscripts except poetry to SW, Box 30541, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503.

*Sinister Wisdom* will not be accepting poetry manuscripts again until after March 1, 1980. After that time, send poetry to Susan Leigh Star, poetry editor, 52 Mars Street, San Francisco, California 94114.

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### SINISTER WISDOM POSTER STILL AVAILABLE

In the spring of 1977, a Tee Corinne solarized photograph of two women making love appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom* 3, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. The poster was printed in the summer of 1977: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17" x 22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom* plus 50 cents to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; bulk rates available.)

Send \$3.50 per poster to: *Sinister Wisdom*, Box 30541, Lincoln, Ne. 68503. Also available in feminist bookstores.

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*Sinister Wisdom* issues 6 through 11 are now on cassette tape. The recordings are made in the style of Recordings for the Blind, with the donated labor of Susan Wood-Thompson; she reads the text, describes the graphics, etc., for women who cannot read the print copies. Each taped issue costs \$3, and a year's subscription costs \$12. Make check payable to Susan Wood-Thompson and mail your order to Susan Wood-Thompson, Box 6516, T Street Station, Washington, DC 20009.

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## BACK ISSUES, WHILE THEY LAST

**Issue 4** (Fall 1977): stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; Joanna Russ's tale for the girlchild in all of us; Lesbian separatism from the inside; photo-essay; interview; reviews, letters and poetry. 96 pp., \$2.25.

**Issue 5** (Winter 1978): Susan Leigh Star, "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness"; Judith Schwarz, "Researching Lesbian History"; Michelle Cliff on speechlessness; Lesbian Day speech by Barbara Grier; fiction; poetry; photo-essay; reviews; interview. 104 pp., \$2.25.

**Issue 6** (Summer 1978): Julia Stanley, Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, Judith McDaniel, Adrienne Rich on language and silence; Marilyn Frye on separatism and power; fiction by Sandy Boucher, Thyme Seagull; poetry; interviews; essays by Sarah Hoagland and Peggy Holland; drawings and photos. 104 pp., \$2.50.

**Issue 7** (Fall 1978): myths, monsters, teeth, etc. Jane Caputi on patriarchal fish stories; Judith Schwarz on being physically different; self-portraits in prose and poetry by Alice Bloch and Susan Wood-Thompson; feminist musings by Melanie Kaye; plus a wealth of fiction, poetry, reviews, drawings, and photographs. 104 pp., \$2.50

**Issue 8** (Winter 1979): "did you say lu-uv?"; storytelling by Sherry Thomas and Audre Lorde; photographs by Deborah Snow; poetry by Judy Grahn; notes on deafness; essay on "that place where nothing is"; interview; reviews; "Scrambled Eggs"; and much more poetry and fiction. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 9** (Spring 1979): JR Roberts on the history of *dyke*, Michelle Cliff on anonymity, Melanie Kaye on violence, Susan Cavin on Lesbian origins, Bertha Harris, Harriet Desmoines, and Irena Klepfisz on Lesbian literature; fiction by Becky Birtha, Jan Clausen, Linda Marie, Kathryn Missett, Ann Shockley, Pearl Time'sChild; an outpouring of fine poetry; photography; reviews; and a puzzle. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 10** (Summer 1979): Special issue on being old and age, guest-edited by Susan Leigh Star. Includes Barbara Macdonald and Baba Copper on their 65th and 59th year, respectively; Audre Lorde on surviving cancer; interview with Mabel Hampton; essays on nursing home women, the time trip, being under 21; poetry; photo-essay; fiction. 104 pp. \$2.50.

**Issue 11** (Fall 1979): Inside the Lesbian Herstory Archives; fantasy and true story; Susan Yarbrough on lesbian celibacy; Andrée Collard on victimization; Joyce Trebilcot, "Conceiving Women"; responses; reviews; poetry. 104 pp. \$2.50.

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no. 12 winter 1980



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