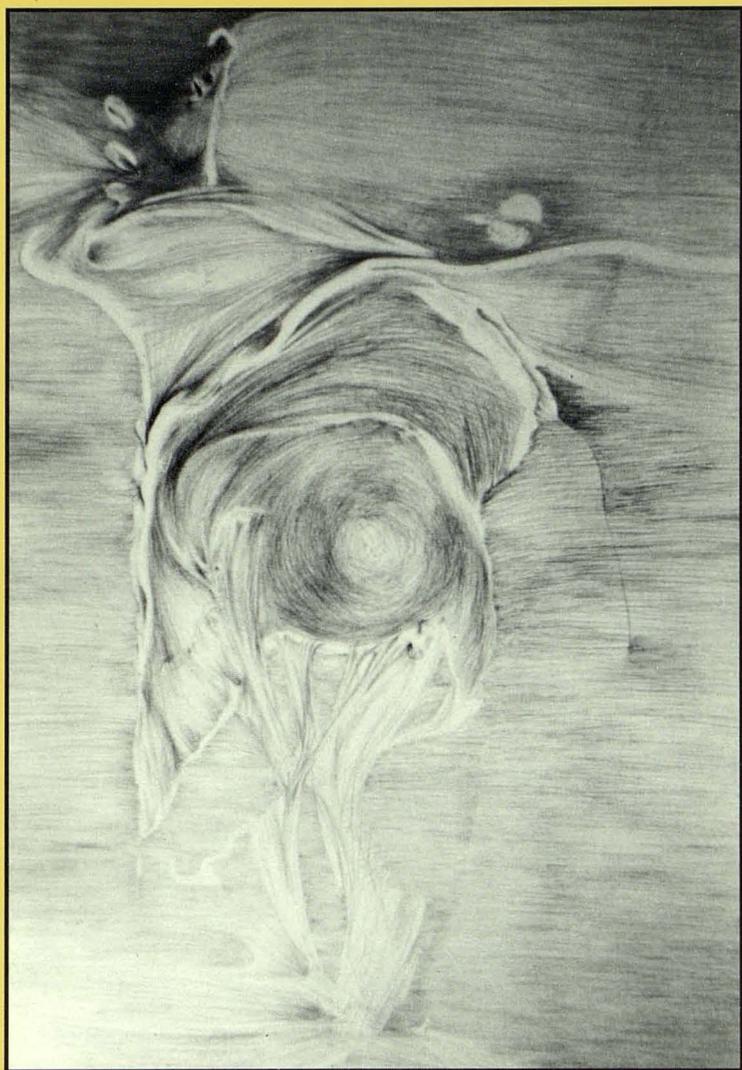


sinister wisdom 42



LESBIAN VOICES



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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

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Lesbian Voices: This may come as a surprise to you, but this is the first intentionally all-lesbian* issue of *Sinister Wisdom* since 1976. In May, inspired by a subscriber's letter, the editorial group unanimously decided to make *Sinister Wisdom* dedicated lesbian space. From #42 on, you can assume that everything we print will be by lesbians.

Why didn't we make this decision sooner? Sometimes it takes an outrageously long time for lesbians in groups to make the next obvious radical move. In the position of "editor" I found myself more of a "conservator" and questioned policy less than I like to think I usually do. I saw myself as keeping continuity with the lesbians who tended *SW* before me, and didn't bring this issue up for a group vote. Message #1: keep constant watch on how power and "tradition" work, what roles do to us. Question everybody — the publishers, organizers, consultants, spokesdykes, experts, owners, laborers, typists, crews, artists, critics, yourself. Certainly we work hard — we all want and deserve credit for the days we spend making our love visible in lesbian community. But we need continuous dialogue about what we're doing, how the positions we take on affect our perception of possibility and change. Of course you know that already, don't you? But it's like knowing that woman-hating and racism permeate our whole lives — we're more comfortable when we let ourselves believe acknowledging the truth of those things makes them go away. As if you can deal once and then your mind and heart are fixed forever.

Something bothering you about a lesbian (or women's or gay or eco-feminist or smash-the-state) event? Worry over it — work over what seems to be a petty annoyance until it becomes a full-blown complaint — bother yourself and your friends until you feel like you get some satisfaction, and then start all over again. We need more cranky dykes.

So thanks to the cranky dykes who wanted a lesbian journal: here she is, full of lesbian voices.

**SW* #2, on Lesbian Writing and Publishing, was, as far as I can tell, the only other purposely all-lesbian issue. Many issues have been all-lesbian, but not by prior editorial decision.

What *is* a lesbian voice? How do we choose the ones we want to present out of the hundreds of lesbians who send us their work?

Because the editorial readers of *Sinister Wisdom* have such diverse interests, backgrounds and tastes how we choose is complicated. Each of us argues for the works which challenge us in ways we're willing to be challenged or confirm our world-views. We present these different challenges and views to each other and hammer it out. We have two or three six- to eight-hour meetings about the material.

Usually pieces get in by majority vote: the more of us who say yes, the more likely it will get in. But one strong, principled "no" can veto a popular piece (and has). It is definitely the case that we spend 3/4ths of our time discussing 1/4th of the work we read. Recently we've decided not to consider work written as first person narrative cross-culturally (a white dyke writing in the voice of a black dyke; a christian writing in the voice of a jew, for instance). Whether or not you agree with this policy, ask your best friend what she thinks about it — chances are you'll have a heated discussion. Some of us feel that writers, especially lesbian writers, should be encouraged to take up the full range of human experience in whatever persona moves them powerfully; and that every writer has the responsibility to portray the diversity of her community. Others feel that this whole business about what writers can do is elitist: no one should ever "speak for" or "assume" another's voice: it reinforces the idea that there are some who are powerless to speak for themselves: it becomes a form of colonization. Imagine eleven lesbians having this discussion for days, trying to agree on a policy.

What I hope is that the urgency and angst of our editorial discussions carry over — that when you read *Sinister Wisdom* you want to talk about it with other dykes — that at least some of the writing we print disturbs you, moves you, makes you feel less isolated with your questions, grief and joy. I hope it's our group ability to stick with a process where we never all agree (well, almost never) that keeps *Sinister Wisdom* vital. Although we rarely publish letters (the length of time between journals and the enormous amount of new work we want to print makes it unfeasible), we read and discuss them. Keep writing us — sometimes we change course on account of what you have to say. And if you live in the Bay Area — the editorial group is open to new members. We want particularly to be more representative of lesbians of color,

working-class and old lesbians — we welcome any dyke who wants space to agitate and create.



Lesbian Voices, part 2: it was my privilege this summer to represent SW at the 4th International Feminist Bookfair in Barcelona, Spain, and do readings in London and Brussels on the way.

I went to Europe hoping to meet lesbians with different perspectives. I was feeling frustrated, isolated. Sometimes it seems the "thrust" of gay organizing is to make lesbians more acceptable to the "mainstream" (read: men, the family and male organizational values); and that radical lesbian analysis of institutions and power relations is "out of fashion," very '70s and passé. I wanted to talk with lesbians from other places about their/our survival issues. I was lucky to be able to begin some of those conversations — it would be silly to say I came back knowing what's going on in Europe — so much is going on, and mostly in languages I don't speak.* But I did get some inklings and some sense of other dykes' visions (and I didn't meet anyone who thought a woman could sleep with a man and still be a lesbian).

In Barcelona, Susan and I attended a series of "unofficial" lesbian meetings (the Fair organizers were, oh, slightly homophobic). There were lesbians with a passion for writing and publishing from (at least) Australia, Scotland, India, Guinea, Argentina, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, England, the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Israel, Scandinavia, Aotearoa, Spain. And first we had to deal with the politics of language: what languages can we use to speak to each other? Who agrees to interpret? To be interpreted to? We eventually agreed to speak and translate in English and Spanish, but the implications of our choices, the difficulty of choosing, were not lost on us. We talked about the situation of lesbians in Spain and Italy — what it's like *not* having a lesbian press. In many countries the only lesbian book available is "rubyfruits." No journals, no presses, maybe a few translations and a couple of pamphlets, only one or two native authors willing/able to come out. We talked personally — what the lesbian and feminist movements have meant in our lives, what it was like to be

* In Europe, not unlike in the U.S., there's an intensification of violent racist and anti-semitic hate-crimes. Responses vary from bravado to terror, but with less apparent denial than I experience in the States.

a lesbian before those movements, to be a dyke under the Franco regime. During our last meeting, we engaged each other in the powerful, open-hearted way of lesbians who are likely never to see each other again; lesbians who nevertheless have a passionate interest in and need for each other; who are inspired by each other's accomplishments and risks.

I have just this little space to tell you about it: it was incredible. All over the world there are lesbians struggling with some of the same issues that you struggle with in your hometown — and different ones. We can get together and understand each other, make a way towards understanding each other, based on respect and our desire to listen. What we need to give to each other is our continued willingness to risk — to take the chance, in the face of oppression, under threats of censure, beatings, jailings, isolation, betrayal, to risk going on with it — and living to tell about it. We need pride in each other — pride in, among many, the lesbians of Colectivo de trabajo de lesbianas of Barcelona, Urban Fox and Onlywomen Presses of England, Artemys Bookstore in Belgium, Esparádica of Mexico, Estro Editrice of Italy, Lesbia of France. We keep finding our voices.



And speaking of taking pride in each other: thanks to Denise Leto and Janet Capone for the Italian-American Women's Issue — for their hard work, their consciousness-raising with us and other communities, their dedication and inspiration. #41 was a fine issue and an important resource — they did a great job.



This note of appreciation is for all of you who send us donations. We've opened subscription renewals to find \$100-\$300 checks; often dykes send an extra three or five dollars. We believe that "sustaining" subscribers are putting their money where their mouths and hearts are as much as "hardship" subscribers do, so we don't publish special lists of those who support us financially. But your financial support does mean we can keep going — we need it; we are, in fact, sustained by it. And you know there are days that seem a little bleaker than others — please keep those checks and letters coming. *Thanks.*

Upcoming Issues

Next year we are publishing only two issues:

#43/44 will be our **15th Anniversary Retrospective** issue. We're going to focus on work from out-of-print *Sinister Wisdoms*. Due out in June, 1991. We could really use **help** with this project:

1. If you have favorite *Sinister Wisdom* articles, especially work from #1-19 (out-of-print), please let us know — and if you are a past contributor to *Sinister Wisdom*, or know past contributors, please send us your current address.

2. If your subscription expires with #43 (the italicized number on your mailing label) **PLEASE RENEW NOW!**

#45 Lesbians & Class is the next issue to which you can contribute. We want to focus on lies about money — in our editorial group we acknowledged that we had all lied about money, though how and why varied dramatically by class. Where do the lies come from? How do we deal with our shame? Our anger? Our bitterness? Are there communities where dykes are actively re-distributing resources? After 20 years of personal discussion around class in our movements, have we found any ways to really change the class set-ups we're born into? We urge middle-class and wealthy lesbians to remember that an embarrassment of riches is not the same as the shame of poverty. This issue will particularly address the concerns of working-class and poor lesbians and will be primarily composed of their work. *Lesbian Ethics* will be putting out an issue on class as well — we hope it appears before our deadline so we have the opportunity to continue discussions started there, as well as present new perspectives. Deadline: June 1, 1991.

#46 or #47 will be the work of **Lesbians of Color**. Watch this space for details.

See inside back cover for details on how to send us your work.

Correction

The correct address for Earthlight Visual Productions — specializing in video and photography — is PO Box 11511, Oakland, CA 94611. We apologize for our typo. Check the classifieds section for current information.

Christina Springer

Wishlist

for my sisters who think process is permanent

Want you to be fierce
virtuous in presence
righteous in thought
imperious in spirit.

Want you to be
nappy, kinky, out of control
& threatening.

Want Rocky Mountain
competing with the skyline laughter.

Want rumpled up / needs ironing
tossed out of the laundry basket
landing in the corner for a week smile.

Want harvest moon
cloud passing over
swaying with the wind butt.

Want climb a coconut tree
in Barbados
during early morning sunrise
rain for five minutes breasts.

Want a kneel down, genuflect
with nothing on my conscience
about to receive communion body.

Want you dancing Manjani
in all of its ancient gloriousness
on the last nerves
of the Missus Clairols, TCBs, Revlons and Posners.

Want your hair permanent
and your emotions turning back
consistently.

Want to roll over
beg Medusa
turn me to stone
for always pestering her in want.

Want soft nappy kinks
springing comfortable control
in gnarled wise youness.

Want you looking dredful
frightening and untamed.

Want warrior & woman simultaneously.

Want truthful honesty in spirit

Want a mirror of yourself learning in love

Melizma Morgan

The Secret Keeper

Yvette was seven when she ran from the place and did not go back. She had left Wanda on the floor with the man still hitting her. Her body did not move except to vibrate each time the man brought the pipe down onto her body.

Down in the alley the brick buildings were hollow. Glass crunched under her shoes as she ran, and each street looked the same. He'd always said he would do this. As long shadows began to fall in the alleys she grew hungry, and her running slowed.

She ran into a dead end street full of warehouses and hid. Was he coming for her now? A row of trashcans offered her nothing but bad smells, the gutters only pigeon feathers.

Night fell. Yvette curled up against the wall, rocking herself, and sang, "forget forget forget." But there were voices in the wind whipping through the broken buildings:

Little girl little girl — learn to be my slave

Learn to be my ornament — my servant to the grave

The hair on her arms stood on end. She heard the rumbling of a train behind her, and turned around to see it coming slowly down the tracks. She jumped inside an open boxcar and prayed for it to take her far away.

All night long Yvette slept inside the boxcar, and it carried her between the buildings and under the city; over little houses and across wide fields. All night long the wheels of the train sang, "forget forget forget," and when she woke up the train had stopped at a station in a town in the middle of the woods.

She ran through forest and fields until she came to a house with a wide front porch. It was surrounded by tall trees, and a woman in a wide straw hat was working in the garden. Her hair was snow white and her skin was dark black.

"Well, look what the wind blew in!" she said. "You look as if you could use a glass of lemonade."

Yvette knew right away that the woman was a witch — the kind who knows about stars and animals and how to heal illness with herbs.

"You've come from a long way, haven't you? Come sit up here on this old porch swing."

So they sat on the porch together and drank lemonade, and Yvette helped the old woman shell peas. When the sun began to set the woman said, "Why don't you stay for dinner?" And she did. They ate green pea soup and sweet potato pie, and when the dishes were all washed and dried, the woman said, "Why don't you stay for good?"

Yvette learned the woman's name was Tabitha, and every day she helped hoe the garden and collect eggs from the chickens. She learned to make sweet potato pie and how to fix the roof. She slept in a bed with cherrywood posts under the eaves and the only song that came to her, through the leaves outside her window, said Shhhh.

Then one day, when Yvette was twelve, a white man came to the door and asked for the old woman. They talked in the parlor for a long time.

"That was a man from the bank," she said. "He wants to take the house."

"He can't," said Yvette.

"He can," said the old woman, "I haven't any money left, and the taxes must be paid."

"I will make some money," said Yvette. She got a job. She worked in a laundromat, she worked in a factory, she cleaned the big white mansions on the other side of town. And as she walked home every night beneath the sky, she heard a whistling:

Little black girl —learn to be my slave

Learn to be my ornament —my servant to the grave

But when she got back to the big old house beneath the trees, Tabitha would be waiting by the fire. Yvette would lay her head down on the old woman's lap and Tabitha would tell her long wonderful stories.

"There was a woman," she would say, "and she was fast and fearless and taller than any man. She was so black she couldn't be seen at night. Sometimes she wore the clothes of a man, and she carried a gun. She was the one who got us free. They came by the huts before it was light, singing that song they'd sing to tell they'd be coming.

Get on board little children

Get on board little children

Get on board little children

There's room for many more

And sure enough she came that night and we got out through the woods, and then in a boat, and then hidden in a hay wagon for miles and miles. Oh I remember her — fast and fearless and taller than any man, so black she couldn't be seen at night." And the woman would sigh. She told the story many times.

"Tell about the witch," Yvette would say.

"Ah," said Tabitha, "she was a slave too, but she wasn't born there like the rest of us. She remembered the land they'd taken her from. They said she could freeze a man just by looking at him. When first she came, they said, the boss tried to hit her with his cane and she just looked him in the eye and he couldn't move. Well, I expect it unnerved him, because they didn't beat her much, no, they left her alone after that. And when I was a little girl, she was an old woman and she'd sit outside on a stump and tell the future with rocks. She told me there was a way to kill a man just by looking at him. She taught me all the things I know."

"Teach me," said Yvette.

Tabitha looked at her as if she were sizing her up. "Seems like I have to teach someone," she said, "or I'd be long gone by now. Someday, Yvette, after I'm dead, you go help some other child."

They stayed up by the fire night after night, and Tabitha showed Yvette all her spells. She taught about stars and animals and how to heal illness with herbs, and when Yvette knew all that she had to teach, the old woman died in her big curved rocking chair.

After that Yvette couldn't sleep. The house seemed so big; the moon so bright. She spent nights in the woods and made friends with the wild dogs. She dreamt of Tabitha night after night, and of the old witch. She grew fast and fearless and taller than any man. She was so black she couldn't be seen at night.

And then she dreamt of the place. She dreamt Wanda rose from the floor. She dreamt of woman after woman rising up from the floor.

"I must go," she finally said, "I cannot wait any longer." She left the dogs to guard the house and jumped into the rolling boxcar. The wheels on the tracks sang:

Little black girl
Go back from where you came
You don't have a face
You don't have a name

But Yvette did not listen, for she stood tall now and she sang into the wind:

Beware beware the woman
Who will not be a slave
She gathers up an army
To bring you to your grave



Bianca's room used to be a pantry, and now she used the shelves for books. Lately in the afternoons, she sat behind the door with her head on her knees, while her mother and Mrs. Terreci smoked cigarettes in the kitchen.

"Look at this — lose 40 pounds in one month, eat all you want, no exercise — I wonder what it is."

"Bullshit."

"No — look they've got a picture. Maybe it's chemicals."

"Let me see that picture. Huh! That's not the same woman!"

Bianca talked to herself in a whisper.

"Are you doing your homework, Bianca?"

"I did it," she said, staring at the pile of textbooks on her bed.

"I don't want that teacher calling up again, you hear?"

"Yeah," said Bianca. She huddled closer to the radiator and closed her eyes.

"I don't know what's wrong with that kid."

"Oh don't worry — they're all like that at that age."

Bianca rocked back and forth.

Mrs. Terreci rattled the newspaper. "Hmmm. They found another pimp in the river."

"Shot?"

"Can't figure out how he died, but they think he was dead before he was dumped."

"I don't know why they're making such a big deal out of it. So there's a pimp in the river. So what?"

"Twelve pimps in the river. Can't figure out how they died and all the girls just disappeared."

"They're probably in the river too — Bianca, are you listening?"

"Unh unh."

"Close your door and do your homework."

She closed the door. She watched the light change on the brick wall across the alley. She went out to the kitchen and poured herself a glass of milk.

"You really don't think that's the same woman?"

Bianca pulled a long knife from the kitchen drawer and crept back to her room.

"Really — look at her face. "

She put the knife under her pillow. It was late that night when Bianca woke up.

"You won't tell anyone now? That's a good girl, that's Daddy's girl." She couldn't breathe. "I'm not going to hurt you this time."

Someone was singing down in the alley, but she couldn't hear the words.

"That's Daddy's good girl."

Someone was singing:

Get on board little children
Get on board little children
Get on board little children
There's room for plenty more

Bianca felt for the cold knife under the pillow.

Oh, get on board little children
there's room for plenty more

* * *

"I just don't understand it." The Chief of Police slammed his coffee cup down on his desk. "This is the fifth one."

Lieutenant Barton cleared his throat. "Sixth, sir."

"It's outrageous. What's the motive, Barton?"

"It certainly seems unclear, sir."

"Why murder the fathers and not the little girls? And where are the little girls?" Chief Dunphy began to pace the linoleum in his office. "I think we're dealing with a real monster here, Barton."

"A real sicko, sir."

"Could it be revenge? What's the connection between these men, who come from as diverse social, economic and racial backgrounds as you can imagine? What's the connection, Barton?"

"They all have daughters, sir."

"What's that got to do with it? I've got a daughter! So've you! No, Barton — it's a tough case. I think this is a job for Inspector Romirez. I believe she's the one who can get to the bottom of this."

"You might say she's champing at the bit, sir."

"Get her in here."

* * *

Mary did not want to go to school. She pressed her head against the cool windowpane and looked at the park below. She thought she might throw up. That'd be okay — they'd think she was sick.

"Mary, are you coming? Your father's ready to drive you."

"Mom, I don't feel well!"

Her father's voice came through the door. "Young lady I'm going to start the car and I expect you out front in two minutes."

Mary swallowed. "Mom, can't I wear pants? Please?"

"Mary, we've been through this before. You know it's against the rules. Now get out of here and get to school."

She turned to the dresser. "Yeah — in a minute." She slid the top drawer open and looked down between the pristine slippers and the clean woolen socks. There lay a small sharp knife with a shiny black handle. She'd taken it from her brother's desk drawer the night before. She picked it up and touched it very lightly to her wrist.

"Mary."

But of course she couldn't — not really.

"Mary!" The doorknob turned and Mary whirled around, dropping the knife into the pocket of her blazer.

"How many times do I have to call you?"

Mary looked out the window at the street outside Madison Day School. There wasn't a sound in the room except for scratching pens and an occasional sniff. A woman was standing in the shadows of the alley, a huge woman looking up at the school, searching from window to window. Her lips moved as if she sang a song. Mary watched her for a long time. At the end of class she handed in one sheet of paper:

"Once upon a time there was a woman who was fast and fearless and taller than any man. She made friends with wild dogs and was so black she couldn't be seen at night. She could kill a man just by looking at him."

At lunchtime the boys would try to pull the girls' skirts up as they stood huddled in groups around the courtyard. "Knock it off!" some of the girls yelled; the ones who stood in circles of friends.

Mary crept over to the frozen ground behind the oak tree in the corner. She brought a book with her and read the same page over and over, without comprehending.

"Mary!" one of them called in a soft, slow singsong. She did not look up from her book. A second later a stone hit her in the back of the head. She swallowed. She did not look up.

"Mary!" they grabbed her book. She ran into the school, toward the girls' bathroom, where she could stand alone in a stall and cry, and no one would see her. Except sometimes, when they followed.

They laughed loudly as they ran. There must have been five or six of them. With that number they hardly needed their years of superior phys. ed. equipment to drag her in the boys' room. It was in fact quite simple to pin her down against the freezing grimy tile.

Mary always prayed to god then. She clenched her teeth and closed her eyes. Today, though, she did not think of god. She thought of a woman fast and fearless who could kill a man just by looking at him. She thought of a little knife in the pocket of her blazer.

* * *

"My God, who would do this?" Even Chief Dunphy had to turn away and put his handkerchief over his mouth. The scene before him was grisly indeed. Five fine youths, five of the nation's best, struck down, yes, slaughtered when life had hardly begun.

"This is a tragedy, Barton. A tragedy."

"Yes, sir. Gruesome too, sir, if I may say so."

"Excuse me, chief," officer Cradley said, "Mary Lincoln has been missing since noon, sir. She was in the same grade as the deceased."

"Thank you, Cradley. Get the girl's parents ready for questioning. And Barton — get Romirez down here!"

* * *

Irene Romirez was making a meal she would not be eating. She found cooking helped her think. She'd been on the case two days and already had an eggplant casserole, two red pepper quiches and a pan of Cajun tempeh in the freezer. Now she was rolling pie crust.

She slammed the rolling pin down. "None of the locks were broken, none of the windows smashed and none of the doors forced."

She resumed rolling, then stopped again. "And no extra sets of fingerprints anywhere!"

This she was sure of because she'd gone over each apartment inch by inch. She had questioned each devastated mother and curious neighbor. She'd been to the lab, the morgue, the scenes of crimes, and in short, all over the city for 48 hours, pausing only to collect her data while chopping onions or braising tomatoes.

She threw the rolling pin down once and for all and began to pace.

This was the most elusive case she had ever worked on. She was famed for her logic, her keen hypotheses and her amazing

capacity for keeping all the facts in her head. She produced criminals in two days in cases others had worked on for months. But the physical facts were not adding up.

"What could be happening to those girls now?" she wondered. She bit her knuckles. "Damn it, think!"

The telephone rang. "Lieutenant Barton here. Chief wants you down at Madison Day. Been a few murders."

"I'll be right there."

* * *

The place had had one window in the kitchen room and one in the room with the mattress. The window in the kitchen looked out against the building next door. A small gas range stood away from the wall, where Wanda stood sometimes, heating coffee. Wanda Wanda Wanda. The name should remember the face. But only the window remained, where Yvette stood watching the pigeons, waiting for food, looking down at the alley of glass. Long afterwards, Yvette dreamt of the window; seeing the gray green paint with its blackened wrinkles, and hearing Wanda's voice; and turning, hoping to see Wanda's face.

Sometimes she'd remember the other window, and lying on the mattress while the man ground himself into her. She could not breathe enough to scream. Over and over again she bled. The window looked out through a gap between the buildings, and it was at this gap that she would stare. She remembered nothing before the place.

Now she stood tall and changed herself at will to a flapping screen door, a blowing newspaper, or a shadow. She darted up fire escapes and leapt across roofs. She put her hands on the sides of buildings to find what she was looking for. She followed trails of sorrow through supermarkets and department stores, on line at the welfare office, and in the subways. She sang:

Hey now woman – leave your desperation

Move now and take — a new reparation.

Sometimes she dreamt that she found Wanda.

* * *

Inspector Romirez leaned against a chain link fence on the edge of a grammar school playground. She had been to this school the day before, questioning teachers about one of the missing girls. She had been to eight schools in the past five days. She had not slept. She hung on the fence, staring without seeing the children inside running and screaming on the blacktop lot.

Irene drew her eyebrows together. She tried to imagine how a twelve year old girl could kill five boys. She tried to imagine any one of these small laughing children killing an adult man. It was absurd. Assuming for the moment that it might be possible with the right amount of luck and desperation, it was still inconceivable that nine of them would do it in the same month, like an epidemic.

She heaved a great sigh, her eyes wandering up and down the schoolyard. Some little girls were playing jump rope nearby, and Irene watched them for a long minute before she began to hear the words they were singing:

Hey nonny-no, I've come to let you go
Hey nonny nee, I've come to set you free

What a strange song, she thought. She leaned closer.

Once there was a big man
Who liked to hit his wife
And stick it in his daughter
But she killed him with a knife
Hey nonny-no I've come to let you go
Hey nonny-nee I've come to set you free

Irene Romirez's mouth fell open. Very slowly she walked into the schoolyard. A group of girls stood in a circle near the entrance playing a clapping game:

I went to tell my mother
She said be a good girl now
I went to tell my father
But he just hit me — pow!
I went to tell my teacher
And got no recess for a week
I went to tell a nun
She said turn the other cheek
I tried to tell a shrink
He said are you repressed
And the preacher only said
Do you have something to confess
They think that they can take you
They think you are for sale
And the judge just says not guilty
Or lets him out on bail

Irene walked very slowly all around the schoolyard. She stopped when the pavement began to move up and down beneath her. A group of girls at her feet sang:

Get on board little children
Get on board little children
Get on board little children
There's room for many more



Mabel was a waitress at the Red Bonnet Diner. She worked 54 hours a week in a pink polyester uniform with a white frilled apron and cap. She could dish out, wipe down, check in and ring up faster than instant coffee. For 54 hours a week, she did not sit down.

"Are you sure you don't want anything to eat, hon?" she asked as she poured black coffee into Irene Romirez's cup.

"No. No, thank you. That'll be all." Irene's hand shook as she picked up the coffee cup. She set it back in the saucer with a rattle.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Cheryl adjusting her cap in the reflection of the pie case. "Looks like she's seen a ghost."

Irene laid her spoon down on the coffee shop table. She remembered being a tiny child and holding her grandmother's hand as they climbed up many flights of stairs. At the very top, across a chipped mosaic hallway, was the door to where the Brujas lived. The Brujas was the oldest woman Irene had ever seen. Through the doorway, across a dim room smelling of dried herbs, she sat on a thin wooden stool, like a spider. She had long white braids and thousands of little wrinkles shooting out from her eyes. She looked into Irene's face and said, "La gue garde los secretos. This one will see."

"You know," she heard one of the waitresses saying, "If waitresses ran the world, this would be the most efficient planet."

"We do run the world," said the older one, "I'd like to see Lefranski in here waiting tables."

The younger one snorted, "For two dollars a fucking hour!"

"And then there's my sister, the one who works in the bank. She says to me, Mabel, I held a million dollars today. I said so what. What are you gonna do? She says nothing, I just think about it sometimes. And it's pretty funny, you know? I mean, what if she just took it?"

Irene shivered. "La gue garde los secretos," she said softly, "the secret keeper."



Walking along a side street carrying two empty shopping bags, a tall white-haired woman turned at the sound of her name.

"Is that you, Miss Miracov?"

"Oh, Miss Donolley, good morning!" she said smiling towards the approaching woman. "Isn't it a beautiful day?"

"Yes, and about time." Miss Donolley pulled her wire shopping cart onto the curb behind her. "Though I have to say, my cold weather coat is much better for shopping."

They walked briskly through the streets to a large store with neon letters. Miss Donolley parked her cart against a tow zone sign.

"And how are your little charges?"

"Not so little!" Miss Donolley said. "Eating me out of house and home—but they're good girls, really. Offered to do the shopping, but I don't think it's safe for them to be out during the day."

"Well, they should be sleeping anyway," said Miss Miracov, as they entered the store, "with all that running around at night." She put two loaves of bread into her shopping bag.

"Look at this!" Miss Donolley held up a package of cheese. "\$2.99—outrageous." She shook her head and slid it into her pocket.

"What did you think of that presentation last night? It seems to me that we could do the same thing at NBC, and if you ask me, Time-Warner would be a piece of cake."

Behind them someone cleared his throat. Miss Miracov continued dropping packages of dried beans into her shopping bag.

"Uh, ma'am?" A tall lanky boy wearing a grocer's apron stood nervously watching them.

"Oh, bother," said Miss Miracov. "Be a good boy, dear, and put your hands up." She drew a small revolver from her purse.

"Lois! That old fashioned thing?"

"Well, I haven't got anything bigger."

Miss Donolley took hold of the boy's chin, forcing him to look into her eyes. "There," she said. "Helpless as a babe, and what can he say to the police?" She ducked under his arm, still frozen in the air. "Nothing but trouble with that thing, Lois."

Miss Miracov stuffed the revolver back into her purse. "Very clever!" she said, grabbing a last bag of apples, "do you think it could work from a video camera?"

Back outside they walked through the street unnoticed, the wire cart rattling behind them.



Irene was not sure if she dreamt it or if she actually left her bed and ran through the streets. She saw lights on in windows where women were meeting. She saw girls darting through streets and alleys holding bricks. One of them took her hand and led her through a deserted park, where the streetlights had been shot out. Only the light of the moon outlined the figure of the tallest woman Irene had ever seen. The woman looked at her intently. "Are you ready?" she asked. Irene nodded. Then there was the sound of a telephone.

"Inspector Romirez? Officer Cradley here — you got to come down to the station."

"What's going on?"

"It's the chief — ya gotta come down here." Irene hung up and picked up her car keys. She knew what she was going to find.

"Police Chief Dead — Daughter, 13, Missing." It was on the front page of every newspaper. "The body of Police Chief Edmund Dunphy was found this morning at 6 a.m. by the newspaper delivery boy. Dunphy's thirteen-year-old daughter Amelia is missing. The cause of death is unknown and police are still baffled. Inspector Irene D. Romirez has been temporarily appointed to Dunphy's position."

There was a riot in the garment district.

The week before it had been the red light zone, and Dunphy had sent riot squads who beat fifty or so prostitutes senseless.

Irene had wondered what she would do if it happened again.

"They're setting fire to the building and they've killed two men," Officer Cradley was fuming.

"Who have they killed?" asked Irene.

"It was Capowitz," Cradley exchanged glances with Barton.

"Who was he?"

"Look, Dunphy had a deal with him, okay?"

"And you knew about it?"

"Aw, come on. Everybody did."

Irene hesitated only a moment before she sent a squad of boys, the ones who most wanted to bash a bunch of bitches senseless.

But no one could identify the very skilled sniper that shot down the row of them. And Irene, from her vantage point on top of an office building, could see the streets filling with women.

American Dreams

Suspended in a sea of blue-grey slate
I can't move from the waist down.
Not being alive from the waist down
brings visions & obsessions of & with
quadriplegics & paraplegics,
wondering how they live, smell,
why they don't just die.
Some people wonder that about blacks,
why they don't just die.
A light-skinned black woman I know
once uttered in amazement about a black black woman
"I wanted to know how did she *live*
being as *black* as she was!"

I don't quite know how to get free
of the karma I've created
but I can see clearly now
that I have created my life.
My right ankle has mud in it,
I'm in debt
I need dental work
& I am alone.
Alone if I keep seeing myself
through *Donna Reed's* & *Father Knows Best's* eyes,
If I don't see the friends,
people who care,
giving as much from their lives as they can.
If you live in the red paper valentine of 1st grade of 1956
then you are alone.
If you live in the real world of now,
of people struggling free
then you are not alone.

Isolation rises up
like the marble slabs
placed on the front
of cheap concrete high-rises
With apartments that start at 500,000 dollars.
It all seems so stupid
but I understand it now,
why they have homeless people
sleeping in front of these
artificial penis looking buildings.
It's so we'll move in,
so such terror will be implanted
in our guts
we'll save money
& buy a concrete box
to live in & be proud
to call it home.
All anybody really wants
is some security,
a chance to live comfortably
until the next
unavoidable tragedy
unavoidably hits them
& splices open their chests,
& takes the veins from their legs,
& carves up their heart
in the name of surgery
or vicious murder
murder *murderer*
ha! ha! ha!
murderer.
No one,
nothing
can protect you
from the murderer.
Not the police, nuclear weapons, your mother, the Republicans,
mx missiles —
none of that

can protect you
from the murderer.
Even if you get all the niggers
out the neighborhood
the murderer might be
a white boy like David Berkowitz
baby-faced Jewish boy
who rarely missed a day
of work at the post office.
ha! ha! ha! *you're never safe!*
Like a crab walking sideways
America hides its belly
under an arsenal of radioactive crust,
creeping along with its
long crustacean eyes,
sucking debris from
the ocean floor
till there is no more,
while the giant Cancer breasts
get biopsied & amputated
& the crab caves in
under the third world's dreams
& 5 million pounds of concrete.
& the murderer
stabs stabs stabs
at the underbelly &
tiny submicroscopic
little viruses
fly out in ejaculate
& claim your life,
while the powers that don't be
join together
for a loving circle jerk
& nostalgic reminiscence
of days gone by,
lighting candles for Roy Cohen
& J. Edgar Hoover as they lay a bouquet of cigarettes
on John Wayne's grave

who is clandestinely slipping
into the wax museum
to suck Michael Jackson's dick
only to find he has had his penis
surgically reconstructed
to look like Diana Ross's face.
& the Trane flies on
like Judy Grahn's wild geese
over a land diseased like cancer
killing flowers by the hour
& a huge hospice
opens up in the sky
& the man quietly tells his wife
as he picks up his rifle,
"I'm going people hunting."
& he steps calmly
into McDonalds & picks off
20 people
& blood pours red
Big Macs fall flat
amid shrieks & screams
while the plastic clown
Ronald McDonald
smiles down on the house
additives & the destruction of
the rain forests built.
& you smile for awhile
feeling ever so American
& in good company
as you eat compulsively,
after all, the whole country does it.
It's just pasta heaven here
till you get your x-ray
or biopsy back.
Making the world safe for democracy
& you can't even evade
heart disease until you're 40
& it attacks quietly

walking on those big
expensive sneakers
Black teenagers wear
as they shove the pawn shop gun
to your head and say,
"GIMME EVERYTHING YOU GOT!"
& for once you are not afraid
cause the nigger has AIDS.
You laugh triumphantly,
finally you've given
him & the world
everything you got!

I was at Clark Center for the Performing Arts
getting ready for my morning ballet class
when this old wrinkled up white faggot
ran up to me, threw his arms around me & grabbed
me in a vise-like grip & screamed:

BE MY BLACK MAMMY SAPPHIRE
BE MY BLACK MAMMY

He held on & wouldn't let go.
Finally I thought to turn
my hand into a claw
& raked straight down his face
with my fingernails.
He let go.
I'll never forget
how hurt & bewildered he looked.
I guess he was just playing.
I was just devastated.

There are no words
for some forms
of devastation
though we constantly
try to describe
what America has done
& continues to do to us.
We try to describe it

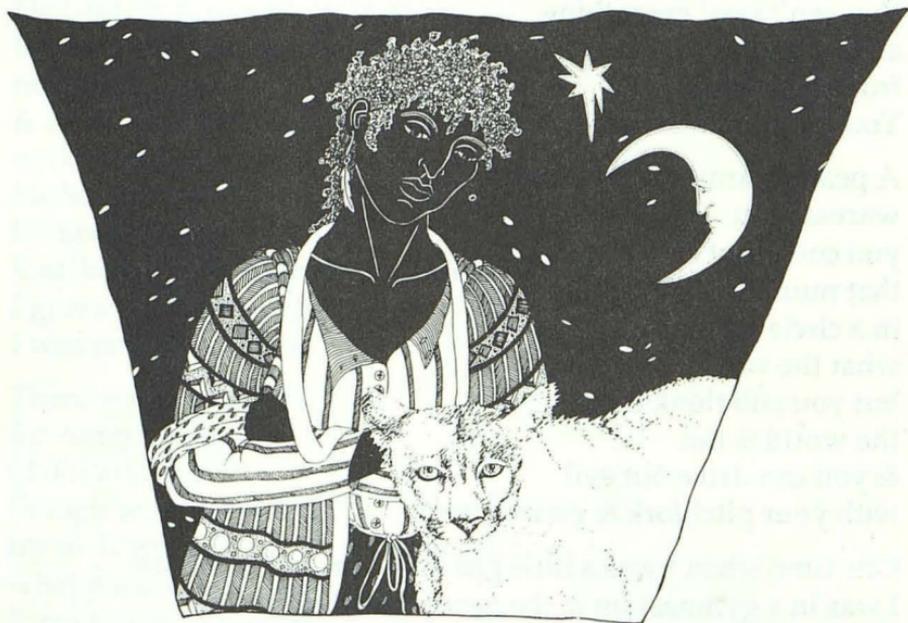
without whining or quitting
or eating french fries
or snorting coke.
It's so hard not to
be an addict in America
when you know numerology
& have x-rayed the inside
of Egyptian mummies 5,000 years
& robbed the graves of Indians
& deliberately blinded children
& infected monkeys & rats
with diseases you keep alive
waiting for the right time
so you can spring 'em
on anyone else who might be making progress.

Well, you're miserable now America.
The fact you put a flag
on the moon
doesn't mean you own it.
You can't steal everything
all the time
from everybody.
You can't have the moon sucker.

A peanut farmer from Georgia
warned you
you could not stay number 1
that number 1 was an illusion
in a circle which is
what the world is,
but you still think that
the world is flat
& you can drive out evil
with your pitchfork & pickup truck.

One time when I was a little girl living on an army base
I was in a gymnasium & the general walked in.
& the general is like god or the president if you believe.
The young woman who was supervising the group of

children I was with said,
"Stand up everybody! The general's here!"
Everybody stood up except for me.
The woman looked at me & hissed,
"Stand up for the general!"
I told her, "My father's in the army not me."
& I remained seated.
& throughout 38 years of
bucking & winging
grinning & crawling
brown nosing & begging
there has been a quiet
10 year old in me
who has remained seated.
She perhaps is the real American Dream.



untitled
Sudie Rakusin

Elana Dykewomon

Some Things Chava Meyer Says:

There is a road away from death.
I came across seas to find it.

But death is desperate for us,
hungry for Jews.

I wonder why Jews taste so good to death?

Did Rose taste good to death?
Did she taste like a charred chicken breast,
the skin sweet and crunchy
when death met her
in that locked room?

Why do I think such things?

The boat was so cold, the shop was so hot.
We thought in america it would be different
but only america's manners are different
or its clothes.

Underneath there is the same —
lust let me call it what it is
I'm not ashamed.

How can I be ashamed anymore
after I saw Rose's body from the fire?

This poem is the introduction to a novel-in-progress about Chava Meyer, born in Russia, whose parents were killed in the 1903 Kishnev pogrom, and who emigrated with a family of her cousins. She became lovers with her cousin Rose, only to see her die in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 in New York City. Many of the deaths from that fire were attributed to management's locking the fire exit doors to keep workers from leaving early. After the fire, Chava tried to be a union organizer in New York, but her grief and her inability to accept the constraints on her gender pushed her west.

She was so soft
she was so good to me

I tell myself stories about how good she was to me —
sometimes I'm not sure anymore
if she really did put her calloused hand on my cheek.

Her eyes were so blue
nothing else in life is that color —

because the color in eyes changes on you —
a person's eyes, all of a sudden,
some feeling shuts out light.

How can that happen?

When we were children we'd pretend
we could control the candle flame
by thinking:

now I think it will be very small —

How can I stop thinking about the fire?
I tell myself stories about her goodness,
how she put her hand on me,
the heat in our rooms unbearable
but at least

it drove everyone else to the fire escape.
And if we lay with just our slippers on
our breathing noisy, labored
who would think something was wrong?

I never would have believed the world
stretched out so far —

I still cannot bring myself to speak
about the sea, crossing the sea —
I pretend I dreamed it and if I try
I believe it although my stomach is bad
after that dream.

My stomach is bad.

She would stick her finger
in the cream at the top of the milk bottles
and hold her hand out to me.

She would pull my lip down
and run the cream against my teeth
until I couldn't stand it anymore and I would
bite and lick her fingers —

we were so lucky.

Listen to me!

What we endured, what we went through,
now she's dead, murdered, they murdered her
when they locked those doors.

All I can do is keep moving
looking at your america traveling west.

The train stops for a minute.

I stare out over this lake —
catch a little bright blue at sunrise
over there, see, in the shallow water.

It's a nice color but
there was no color, really, like her eyes

and I forget for a minute

I say

we were so lucky.

Ruthann Robson

Looking for Lesbian Legal Theory

A Surprising Journey

From the sandy whites of Florida through the southern forests' greens, through the sunset mesa pinks and high desert beiges, into the tie-dyed urbanity of Berkeley, I travel across the country in order to do a project (a book!) I'm calling *Lesbian Law*. I've been an attorney for the last ten years, and much of what I want to do involves writing about the practical problems of discrimination that affect lesbians. I believe I'm going to get the luxury of an "academic" year to think and write about the possibilities and perplexities of a lesbian jurisprudence — a lesbian philosophy of law. I'm torn between lesbian anarchism (the law is totally irrelevant) and legalization of lesbianism (law is the answer to our problems, including problems in our intra-lesbian relationships).

I am looking for a symphony of lesbian voices singing about conflict resolution, about discrimination and child custody and the criminality of our sexuality. I want to look at the law through the kaleidoscopic lens of lesbian theory. I'm excited about the project, but I don't feel especially inventive or creative, for I see the project as one of application: applying lesbian theory to legal theory. I've been reading lesbian theory for longer than I've been a lawyer: I've got the 42 boxes of books to prove it.

So, on the drive across country, I don't look for lesbian theory. I think I know where it is: safely snuggled in a Roadway freight truck. Instead, I look for places that I've always wanted to see. Window Rock is difficult to locate if one doesn't already know where it is (we don't); it isn't mapped as a "must see" attraction in the AAA Guidebook. But this site of the tribal government of the Navaho Nation is worth all the U-turns. The space is singularly sacred. I gaze a long time at the round hole in the stone, almost forgetting that I had assumed the "window" would be a rectangle.

Much less sacred is the University of California at Berkeley campus. I feel too old to be a student. I've been accepted into a rarified graduate law program and as an affiliated scholar with a feminist

"research group," both on the basis of a four page, nine chapter outline of "Lesbian Law." At the orientation meeting for the graduate law program, the materials list my project as "feminism and the law." During the introductions, I sip the overly strong coffee popular in Berkeley and listen to the other students, most of whom are foreign lawyers from other industrialized countries, describe their projects as various legal aspects of international trade. When I say my name, I correct "feminism" to "lesbianism." When I relate this story at the feminist research group, I wittily add that everyone groped for their English dictionaries. The truth is more mundane: everyone at the graduate law meeting stared at the ceiling; as did I. At the feminist "research group," no one stares at the ceiling, yet the law aspect of my project seems alienating. The only other feminist engaged in an explicitly lesbian project is researching psychological issues.

At the law school I often felt as if I were surprising everyone by my aberrant interest in a bizarre topic. For those law professors, law students and lawyers whose interest persisted beyond surprise (often because I was directly engaged with them), the rearguard reaction was dismissive. "How is what you are doing any different from feminist legal theory?" I was asked repeatedly, and less often, "How is what you are doing any different from gay rights legal theory?" These questions resurfaced in responses to a cross-country "informal survey" I conducted by mail of lesbian legal workers. Either the *real* problem was gender or the *real* problem was sexual orientation, but lesbianism definitely did not qualify as real within the realm of legal theory. My work was petty, and worse, divisive.

The relevance — the right to existence, space, breath — of my work on *Lesbian Law* has been challenged in a manner I had never before experienced, including when my work consisted of studying German philosophers who were either long-dead or who had been Nazi sympathizers. I became what I like to think of as disarming; expert in the smiling sentences that started "yes, but." I mouthed expressions like: "Just as feminist legal theory has been heterosexist, so gay rights legal ideology has been sexist." I wrote footnotes to support such statements. I could cite to the "observation" by feminist legal theorist Catharine MacKinnon that the "terrain of feminism" is "relations between the sexes."¹ I could discuss the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, in

which the Court ruled there was no constitutional right to "homosexual sodomy," apparently construing "homosexual" to mean "between men" and the outpouring of legal commentaries disapproving the decision but furthering the interpretation of "homosexuality" as "male homosexual-ity."² I quoted and cited and footnoted until I could footnote my footnotes.

While I could footnote exclusions, I was less successful footnoting positive expressions of lesbian theory. Within the world of legal scholarship, there were many articles on "feminist jurisprudence" that had been written by women I knew to be lesbians. Lesbianism, however, was becoming an epistemological question for me: how did I know the author was lesbian? My knowledge was usually based on incidents outside the legal scholarship: gossip, supposition and in one case a narrative in a lesbian publication. I adopted Cheryl Clarke's methodology for identifying a lesbian as a woman "who says she is."³ This excluded almost all of the feminist legal theory published, but I was comfortable with this because for the most part, whatever the sexuality of their authors, I did not find the articles particularly "lesbian."

Outside of the arcane atmosphere of legal theory, I was less comfortable with my inability to footnote lesbian theory. The 42 boxes of books had made their way across the country, arriving looking as if they had been tossed from a small aircraft, and were now stacked at various angles on the bookshelves. But as I looked and relooked at those texts, I was becoming troubled at the integrity of claiming many of them as lesbian. Is Mary Daly a lesbian theorist? For years and years, I had consistently read the term "radical feminist" as a cipher for "lesbian," but then again, as a girl I had assumed "ladies night" emblazoned in neon signs of bars meant "lesbian." I have never thought we were invisible: I saw us everywhere: Even where we weren't. I worried about the possibility of an adult bout of false optimism.

My footnote crisis exacerbated my discomfort with the term "radical feminist." As Joan Nestle has written: "Articulated feminism added another layer of analysis and understanding, a profound one, one that felt so good and made such wonderful allies that for me it was a gateway to another world — until I realized I was saying radical feminist when I could not say lesbian."⁴ Nestle's essay is en-

titled "Butch-Femme Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950's;" she is writing about the import of lesbian relationships occurring in the decade I was born. Yet her essay resonates with me as one of those girls who educated herself off of the streets and out of the bars. Theorizing and reading were my strategies of survival. I needed a politic to justify my body's desires. I thought radical feminism was that politic; I thought lesbianism was "only" the body's desires.

But in Berkeley as my daily life organizes itself around doing lesbian legal theory, I strengthen my commitment to lesbianism as theory, as politic. Theory. Politic. Not lifestyle or sexual preference/orientation/persuasion. Not radical feminism. Not even lesbian-HYPHEN-feminism. Lesbianism. A lesbianism that can have relevance to legal theory. A lesbianism grounded in the body's desires but not reducible to it.

Yet again and again I am confronted with my own confusions between radical feminism/lesbian feminism/lesbianism. In a student-organized seminar on feminist legal theory at Boalt Hall, there are efforts to incorporate lesbianism into feminism. I even participate in some of these efforts. At the end of the semester Chinese dinner to celebrate the course (and obliterate its tensions), the conversation momentarily clears my confusions. The heterosexual women are confessing the multitudes of instances in which they have denied their feminism because they have been mocked for it. One woman proposes that what feminism "really needs" is a "public relations campaign so that people understand feminists aren't perverts who don't shave their legs." What these heterosexual women are saying is that feminism has been degraded by dykes. What I have implicitly said is that feminism has elevated lesbians. While this is certainly not the first time that I have experienced lesbianism as being *a drag* on feminism, not the only time I have felt like the poor relation at the feminist banquet, I decide it is going to be my last.

I reduce my "lesbian theory" books by half. My hunger is satiated by the works of Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Joan Nestle, Judy Grahn, and Marilyn Frye (whose wonderful book *The Politics of Reality* is nevertheless subtitled "Essays in Feminist Theory"). I reread every back issue of lesbian periodicals. I gain a deeper appreciation for the lesbian separatists, especially Sarah Hoagland and Jeffner Allen, who insist on the term lesbian, who insist on lesbianism as

a theory. I look again and again at all the lesbian fiction, lesbian history, lesbian psychologies and lesbian criticism. I revisit lesbian poetry I had memorized years ago: "There are words I cannot choose again: / humanism androgyny / Such words have no shame in them, no diffidence / ..."⁵ *Feminism* is becoming a word I cannot choose again; the shame in it is not mine.

I begin not to miss the works excluded because they "do not say they are" lesbian. Lesbian theory is varied, diverse and fascinating. The law review articles I complete, scholarly and footnoted, reject both feminist and gay rights ideologies as a basis for lesbian legal theory. I complete an article entitled "Lesbian Jurisprudence?" I am counseled not to submit it for publication because it is not perfect and the first work to see print in such a novel area should be as perfect as possible. I am told that the sources cited are "way out." I am told that the article does not really "solve" the separatist problem within lesbianism. I submit the article anyway.

Another article begins as a historical piece, but transmutes into a piece of historiography: a lesbian theory of lesbian legal history. I criticize the prevailing notion of lesbian sexuality as unpunished throughout history; there are cases, executions, banishments. There is also a famous Swiss jurist in the 16th Century who advises authorities with no prior experience with lesbian crimes to omit the customary description of the crime when reading the death sentence.⁶ As much as I distrust conspiracy explanations, I posit a conspiracy of silence on the part of legal authorities surrounding lesbian crimes. Relevant to legal history, it seems I can answer (at least partially) Lillian Faderman's question: "Who Hid Lesbian History?"⁷ They did. And they did it on purpose.

But we did too. We did it on purpose, for our own protection and our own survival. And we continue to do it, to hide our own history. Although it is popular to assert that lesbians as a category did not exist before the 19th Century "rise of the sexologists," we hide history in our selection of what qualifies as "lesbian." If we choose lesbian legal history as applicable to upperclass school mistresses, we might conclude that lesbianism was legally unimaginable; if we choose lesbian legal history as encompassing prostitutes, vagrants, thieves and the criminally "insane," then the legal history of lesbianism is not a portrait of immunity.⁸ Our

lesbian theory determines, at least in part, our choice of history, our choice of what is revealed and what remains hidden.

Our lesbian theory, however, is itself hidden. To rephrase Faderman's question: Who hid lesbian theory? obviously, "they" did and "they" do. It is difficult to find time, space and money in this patriarchally constructed world to "do" lesbian theory; it is difficult to publish and difficult to obtain, even from "alternative" sources.

But we hide it too. We hide lesbianism as a theory within radical feminism and gay rights ideology. We deny that lesbianism is a theory. If we are predisposed (or pre-educated) to believe a theory is necessary, we decide lesbianism is too lonely; it needs feminism or gay rights ideology. I want to challenge this. I am not denying connections or the value of coalitions, but I am proposing that lesbianism must be self-referential and independent. True connections and coalitions are not constructed among ideologies if one ideology is considered derivative: one does not make common cause with one's shadow. On the other hand, if we reject theory as a bourgeois concept not necessary to our daily lives, we decide lesbianism is a body without a politic. Our sexuality becomes a happenstance, an irrelevance. I want to challenge this too. Theory is the way in which we conceptualize and understand our realities. Although as imperfect as all analogies, I sometimes think of theory as a roadmap: it helps me negotiate places I have not yet experienced, helps me decide where I want to go and how to get there. Theory is not dogmatism: I do not drive through the road block because the map indicates the road is passable.

Theory mapped my way across the country, to a place where, despite the drought, it seems to rain a lot as I compile footnote after footnote. I am looking for lesbian legal theory. I am substantiating it, citing it, quoting it. And, strange as it may seem, those footnotes aren't for anyone else but us. Even as the money runs out and I interview for jobs, explaining my recent scholarship to glazed eyes over mouths that repeat: "How is this any different from feminist legal theory? From gay rights ideology?" I know that those footnotes aren't for these interviewers or the next job or the "interesting" resume. I am not footnoting for them. I'm footnoting for us. For if we hide lesbian theory, we hide it from ourselves.

I am committed to rewriting those footnotes into a book that is accessible and intelligent. I imagine the finished book will dispense

with all those academic superscripts and postscripts. Meanwhile, a law student calls me on the phone to accept an article, telling me: "The article is really great. I've given it to dykes here who aren't involved with the law at all and they think it's really great." I am thrilled. The article is not great, I know, although I sometimes think it is good. In my more effusive moments I allow myself to think it is very good, but it is definitely not great. It is only overdue.

I want a lesbian legal theory of lesbian battering; of lesbian relationships (to contract or not to contract?); of sexual "privacy" within lesbian communities. I'm looking, not for definitive answers, but for possibilities. I suppose I'm looking for lesbian legal theories. I bargained for the luxury of this time to look for lesbian theories and I don't want to waste any more time hiding or being hidden in feminism, radical feminism and gay rights. *A lesbian theory is that which says it is.*⁹ I am satisfied with this; satisfied with the lesbian theory I am finding. But I am thirsty for more; and more.

I continue to look because I am thirsty. But I also want to look for lesbian legal theories for all those lesbians who have ever been involved with the law, perhaps as legal workers, perhaps as clients invoking legal protections, but also as subjects of the law's awful powers capable of depriving lesbians of their physical freedom, their children, their lovers and their lives. I want to look for lesbian theories for that lesbian who thought the article was great; for all the lesbians-like-me who thought ladies' night was meant for women-loving-women; for all the lesbians-not-like-me who knew the window in the rock would be round; for all the lesbians we would have been and all the lesbians we are.

1. MacKinnon in DuBois, Dunlap, Gilligan MacKinnon and Menkel-Meadow in "Feminist Discourse, Moral Values and the Law — A Conversation," 34 *Buffalo Law Review* 11, 20 (1985).

2. My favorite example is this quote attempting to support a claim that homosexuality does not threaten the institution of heterosexual marriage:

... by persuading homosexuals into a heterosexual marriage, the state is acting to increase the divorce rate. *A homosexual can survive in a heterosexual marriage by using fantasies of men* to experience an erotic feeling. However, this frustrates a homosexual's natural feeling, just to conform with heterosexual marriage.

Casenote, "Bowers v. Hardwick: The Constitutionality of Georgia's Sodomy Statute," 20 *John Marshall L. Rev.* 325, 340n.107 (1986) (citations omitted) (emphasis added).

3. C. Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* 128 (1981).

4. J. Nestle, *A Restricted Country* 107 (1987).

5. Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources" in A. Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*, 60, 66 (1978).

6. Germain Colladon is the jurist. See generally Monter, "Sodomy and Heresy in Early Modern Switzerland," 6 *J. Homosexuality* 41 (1980/1).

7. In *Lesbian Studies* (ed. Margaret Cruikshank 1982).

8. This conflict is expressed in the comparison of two articles, Everard, "Lesbian History: A History of Change and Disparity," 12 *Journal of Homosexuality* 123, 129-30 (1986) (discussing an unmanageable "morally insane" housemaid who had "the habit of holding her hands to her genitals at night, and even went so far as to invite her aunt, with whom she shared a bed ...and even to try to force her to do it together as man and woman,") and Faderman, "A Response to Myriam Everard's "Lesbian History: A History of Change and Disparity," 15 *Journal of Homosexuality* 137, 140 (1988) (discussing the concept of romantic friendship). Faderman attempts to resolve the conflict:

Everard found the true ancestor of the lesbian in Magdalena van W., a woman discussed in an 1882 medical journal article on *insania moralis*, who led a life of vagrancy, street fighting, thievery, and prostitution, which brought her into regular contact with police and corrective institutions. Magdalena is undoubtedly a spiritual ancestor to many women who identify as lesbian today, not only women of the lower class, but women who were born into the middle class and have declassed themselves, often out of disgust with social institutions. Many other contemporary lesbians, however, find they have much less in common with hard-drinking, rough and ready street women like Magdalena, and much more in common with Aagje Deken [mentioned in the Everard article], who longed to "live next to her with whom my heart is already joined." But then, perhaps we each have a right to define for ourselves who is our spiritual predecessor.

Id. at 140-1. Faderman's resolution that "perhaps" we have the right to define lesbian predecessors for ourselves does not entirely answer the question for me. If I feel more identification with "lower class" Magdalena, am I justified in ignoring Aagje Deken? Or if I feel more comfortable reading love letters than clinical records, does that mean I should limit myself to the literate classes? The choosing of a "spiritual predecessor" in what I see as essentially a class conflict has important consequences for the history — and the theory — I will produce. If I choose the writer of love letters as the predecessor, I might easily reach a conclusion that lesbianism was unpunished and unpunishable. If I choose the housemaid, I might conclude that lesbianism was censured by the law, although perhaps under different rubrics, such as "vagrancy" or "moral insanity."

9. See *supra* note 3 (Cheryl Clarke).

Study

I sit at the table with her, in a kind of dual trance. No conversation, hasn't been for an hour or so. Occasionally she says "K" or "S" or "B." I answer hmm, or no. Sometimes she cannot decipher the letter with her fingers. Then I take it from her hand and replace it with another.

Her large, working hands flutter as delicately in mine as an intelligent infant's. They are cold, dry, sensitive, trained to assist her evaluation of the physical world from early childhood. I, too, have this habit. Though I taught myself to read at four, I early realized that my perception of an object was clarified by touch. Always got me into trouble in museums.

But Polly's dyslexia and related "learning disabilities" were enough to keep her from learning to read until she became adult. She reads painfully slowly, not fluidly enough to permit her to take classes. When my kids, both dyslexic, were unable to read in the third and fifth grade, I made sandpaper letters, used with a blindfold, for them to learn with. Polly is using them now.

I thought I would be bored sitting in silence with her, while she picked out and aligned the letters. I wasn't expecting this tender, intense communication that is happening between us. I've moved under the cover that she has developed over the years. The feeling is familiar, a place that I haven't known outside nursing my daughter, and having nothing to do with mothering. This is an intimacy that depends neither on words nor images, but feelings alone, a telepathy of currents we usually try to protect and explain, but rarely to share.

Her feelings are strong and clear. Effort, intense concentration, tentative solution, sureness; or conversely, disorientation, confusion, release. I am sending calm, encouragement, praise. At the same time I know that it is her own drive, pride and determination that keeps her going.

Places in my heart are opening that I haven't known were closed, places covered with cold stones, tumbled-down houses. I

watch the sweat on her neck curl the fine hairs there, seeing, feeling the concentration, the pathways, which are so different from most other people's, but are very similar to my own. It is exercise to learn. Polly is always learning, observing, sifting, evaluating, but she has not had the opportunity to team these two, usually separated, areas together before.

Polly's quickness, her sureness, her method of making markers for herself strums my brain, releasing long unsounded chords of concentration in harmony with another person. I feel tenderized, alert to this opening, like a person kept a long time in darkness, let into the light without sunglasses. Will this make it too dangerous to continue?

But Polly is entirely her own person sorting these letters. Because she does not know alphabetical order, she cannot guess the next from the one that has come before. I give them to her in order. A few times she could not decipher the letter. Since I was not talking to her, and since I wanted to interfere as little as possible, I did not tell her to leave a space when a letter was not decoded. She puts the unclear letter aside.

Now, at the end, when only the "W" and a few other letters are left out of order, I hold both her hands in mine. The right one is stationary, holding a card with a letter on it. With my left hand, I guide her left hand over the letter. Her trust is great enough so that she has no resistance in her fingers, yet they are not flaccid. The fingers tremble, sense, respond and finally lead. At that I fade away. She recognizes the letter. An intensity of satisfaction at that.

Polly has the entire alphabet laid out. She feels the letters and identifies them all in order. I ask her to spell out several words, still with the blindfold on: her name; and; is; the; stop. Her quickness awes me. She unerringly finds the letters. She asks for the spelling of my name. I answer one letter at a time. When they are all lined up precisely on the table, Polly removes the blindfold.

Ruth Farmer

from the Plantation Poems

Mistress

I

We run the household
Biddie and me
With the help of the other hands
So Mistress gets to entertain and
Speak of her importance.

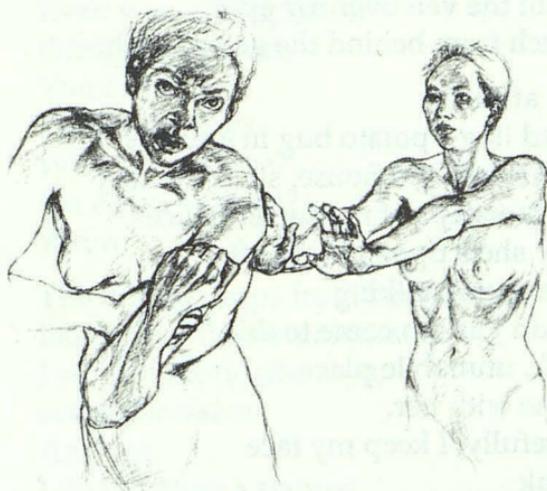
We greet the guests,
Make sure they're fed.
We smile and make them welcome.
For they're important,
Just like Mistress
And deserve our respect.

She is praised for her wonderful house
The parties she gives:
"Things are always SO nice here.
How do you do it?
"Good help is so hard to find."
She's grateful to us for dancing attendance
And pats us on our heads with one fair hand.
The other holds the knife
That spreads the butter on the bread
We earn for being good little girls.

II

The white feminists need us once again
Ornaments, decorations,
For their what-not shelves.
An Asian here, a Latina there, two Blacks please,
And a Native American as long as she
Is using her tribal name.

We're placed on the shelf
For future reference
When the movement requires our presence
To lend authenticity to the cause.
We're okay as long as we keep quiet,
And don't presume to speak,
To name our own concerns
Only our feminist friends can articulate
The complexities of the struggle.
Only they have the analytical perspective
On the pertinent issues.
They don't need us to say anything anyway
Just stand there looking ethnic.
And by all means, stop being so hostile.
They are only trying to help
After all, we are sisters,
Somewhere
Under the skin.



Why Am I So Angry?
Elise Dodeles

This Shame is a Carnivore

The poet stands at the podium.
A Chinese dragon unfolds its wings
out of her impassive face.
No one notices.
Perhaps they don't know
what Chinese dragons look like,
or even that they exist,
like the Asian woman poet
with her blood red mouth
and her small white teeth.

She will not stop reading the poems
that gouge the inside of my ribs.
This is who you are,
she says,
looking me in the face.
I pull the veil over my eyes,
watch from behind the gauze cloth.

I'm afraid.
I curl like a potato bug in a corner
of this twilight house, strain to hear
the footsteps of my secret police
now she's tipped them off.
Please stop talking.
I didn't ask to come to this
dark, immobile place
alone with her.
Carefully, I keep my face
blank
so she can't read it.

Who'd be such a fool
to choose my childhood
where the word heart
shimmers like mythic standing waters
in the desert's mirage
beside the Qajar mosque,
its ochre mud bricks
dripping like honey in the sun.
This shame is a carnivore
and I am its only sustenance
or pleasure.

The poet gestures for us to sit at her feet.
She is the phoenix.
We are the other three hundred and sixty
feathered species. To this assemblage
she articulates my silence
while I burn with shame:

I came to this barren place.
I have no home.
My spirit wanders,
disconsolate,
from continent to continent.
Even you, sitting there,
think you see me.
You cannot.
You in the back.
What do you see?
An Asian woman?
Wrong.

The dragon leaps from her mouth
like spring floods unleashed.
I am not exotic, she says,
nor submissive.
And, no,
I do not have a slanted
cunt.

Take this bitterness
and eat it
or I will spew it
all over this city of yours
until your plains burn with its gall.
You probably won't even notice.
You are like that.
Anything that doesn't fit your image,
Asian whore, Asian wife,
you don't even see.
So very convenient.
Everything in America is convenient.
That is why I float
like a defiled person's ghost.

From inside the small woman's
small red mouth
the dragon's wings settle,
its mail clinks like money
as it folds into a disturbed,
disturbing sleep.

The audience applauds.
Politely.
The poet pulls the tiny hoods
Caucasians call the epicanthus fold
over her eyes,
sticks her chin in the air
like a moistened finger
gauging the winds for her next flight.

The Significance of Stones

25 Kislev 5750 greetings sisters
we interrupt this reading
this is the voice of radio VCN
your Vilda Chaya Network saying
jew to jew and
dyke to dyke
on this second night of miraculous light
in this the third year of Uprising
take note take hope
as we recite the meaning of light
may we also invoke the significance of stones

on this second night in this third year
jew to jew and dyke to dyke
tonight I appeal to you
my message is as clear
as the imperative
to take the risk
to add my voice and
celebrate tenacity
bear witness to atrocity
and most of all insist
that genocide
is genocide and must be stopped
that we resist those fascist boys
Rabin Shamir Sharon and Bush
the IDF their "iron fist"

that jew to jew and dyke to dyke
I come to you tonight
in anger and in black
to make a mockery of their "diplomacy"
their rubber bullet poison gas diplomacy
their uproot trees starvation diplomacy

their isolation deportation mass detention
occupation curfew diplomacy
collective punishment diplomacy
assassination pass law diplomacy
taxation without representation diplomacy
close the schools kill the children diplomacy
in this third year this second night
jew to jew and dyke to dyke
as we recite the prophecy
"by spirit not by strength"
may we recognize and reaffirm
the wisdom of stones

as were the Maccabees a people of stones
as was the Temple freed by stones
so may it be this year
in this third year of Uprising
that children of stones born without fear
dream only of the melody of motion

as for the Maccabees
in this third year
there is no going back
the revolution of stones
will not be stopped

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Notes:

25 Kislev 5750 — December 23, 1989, by the Jewish Calendar.

2nd Night of Chanukah — Festival of the Miraculous Lights.

Vilda Chaya — wild, untamed woman.

Uprising — The Intifada, Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

IDF — Israeli Defense Force.

The prophecy — The prophecy of Zechariah "Not by strength, not by power, but by my spirit..."

The Maccabees — Chanukah celebrates the rededication of the temple, freed by the Jewish Maccabees who overthrew Syrian despots with 3 years of guerilla warfare.

The Wisdom of Stones — "Ancient rocks who never leave home" — Merlin Stone.

Peaceniks

They are bickering about the plan. I don't participate. It's a men's plan.

The Palestinian isn't being consulted. I'm not perceptive enough to see if he notices. My best friend notices and speaks out. She receives vague replies from the opposition. They're being evasive.

The traffic noise of East Jerusalem is close by. It has its reality and we have ours. There are people in the room, with that mysterious, repetitive dynamic that strange rooms engender in strange people, and they are bickering. The Palestinian doesn't bicker because conflict takes two and he's only one.

There are faces to look at in this room. I'm a cynic; I study astrology, so I study the faces. This man has eastern eyes, that woman has western lips. I catalogue my observations. I'm not too attentive to the speakers.

The power in this room is in the hands of one man. He has a status position in the Israeli establishment. I marvel at how thoroughly he plays it down. A newcomer might not even guess. I happen to know where he lives. He's got the best of both worlds.

Although there are women present, I don't feel supported. The views of my best friend and me are minority views. The people from overseas have the safety of distance. The establishment man has the safety of normative lies.

Outside there shines a glorious sun, glory being a local commodity. Boys are selling watermelons down in the street. There are moments when I'm glad my kid isn't out selling watermelons, and then there are other moments when I think that he's bloody lucky he doesn't have to. We live our class differences.

The men are planning a demonstration that involves a lot of sheet plastic. This has been tried in Australia and will undoubtedly work here. It will certainly annoy the army. For myself, I don't go where the army goes. I'm too scared.

A woman is talking. My best friend and I have many speculations about this woman. Our speculations roam freely and reach all areas of life. What does she do, and with whom, under what circumstances, and with precisely what techniques.

We leave no stone unturned. She is fast food for thought.

There is now a clear difference of opinion. Some are for and some against. I look around to see if there are any undecided. I like to feel in good company. There is vacillation on some of the faces. It looks at home there. I pick up some deep encoded body language. I can't read the code. The coders don't know they're sending.

We take a break. They stand about, placidly heterosexual. To myself I make blanket generalizations about their politics. I'm sure their politics stop at the bedroom door. I don't even trust the feminists, and I virulently suspect the men.

There have been sordid crosscurrents of anti-semitism today. There have been great niagaras of Christian condescension. There have been background threats of Israeli martial arts. Thus have I perceived the action. I cannot take sides.

We are drinking coffee and eating sandwiches. Our hostess is kind. She is a woman of faith. I am an off-duty heretic. We are becoming unfocussed. No god blesses these rooms. There are books for sale in three languages but god reads only one. There are sparks in our glances.

We go back into the room. Now the business begins of decisions. To some this will have a high price. Here and there I've met people who count costs in emotions. Here and there people have counted me as one of their costs.

There is war in this country. It bears many false names and at the moment it isn't called war. But in rooms such as this one we enact all its conceited pretensions, and we skirmish and parry and make fools of our dead educations.

We have all fallen silent. Some visiting clergy are trying out a new confrontation. I'm sincerely annoyed: they don't have the right to guilt-trip the soul-searching locals, and they don't have the sense to use their resources on authoritarian targets. The influence of the church could do much if it ever faced hard facts.

But we Jews are on the defensive, and the point is being lost. Our Palestinian guest is bewildered by hot double meanings. My impatience makes me aggressive and I jump into the fray. There are ghosts in the room and they're soon going to scare us away.

I lock in a one-to-one fight with a man of my people. So bitter am I that it doesn't even matter which one. That one won't serve in the army but will torment his wife. This one may not beat his wife

but he picks on his children. I have no power but I'll send their stuffed egos to hell.

Anger has entered the room and the atmosphere changes. No longer can we entertain illusions of guardian angels. We would cheerfully sell each other out to our religions' old devils. We are sinners aswim in the gore of bent and torn minds. The platitudes that brought us to meet are the earliest casualties.

I lay my beliefs at my feet and take off mental gloves. As far as I know, I have never been innocent once. It's a pleasure to me to tear off the masks of these showmen. To live with myself is a burden whatever I do.

Soon we are all out of breath and the battle's inconclusive. For the hundredth time I find I can hurt but I cannot destroy. The world views of those whom I meet remain forever intact. I get rid of some of the poison but the poison's still in me.

The rush towards honest encounter brings an imploding self-hate. I have lived in the whorl of that vortex since the day I was born. The Palestinian's pain has a dignity I can only envy, and I respect his clean wounds with an ease that I don't give my own.

This room full of people is judged by the fates even as we each judge. I have not yet untangled the rhetoric surrounding our luck. Should we reconvene in a decade our changes might cruelly surprise us. There are already scars on our souls that will only show then.

I've made enemies today who will remember me for years in the future. This is a small town and circles entwine and collide. I value my enemies: they are proof that I've almost existed. Existence itself always seems to float far beyond proof.

My best friend and I can't remain any longer. We have cut ourselves off from the conformity everyone pays. If we took the majority path we would live unforgiven. Our choices are something we cherish and don't give away.

When we stand up to leave a breath of relief swirls up near us. We've demanded the subtle in a male world of unsubtle brutes. Even peaceniks will hide from nuances and that's their undoing. We hide with each other and they calmly hide from themselves.

I say to myself, it's not worth the expense of belonging. I've gone it alone in the past and I'll go it again. No group can comfort the guilt that I anyway feel. Out the window I see the city and her shaded eye.

We have signed the list that says today we've been present. In these unpredictable times this may turn out to be no small risk. I don't know if the risks that we take have a value in heaven, and only we know the struggle we've had in addressing our fears.

Tomorrow I'll sit in my workplace and look at the people. They're respectable people who won't talk to Arabs like equals. I'm no better than they are; I haven't the courage to challenge them. But these questions are part of my day like the air I reluctantly breathe.

Now it is evening and we are making our way through the city. I am cold with self-disgust though the summer goes warmly about us. I will justify nothing to no one — and anyway who wants to listen? I am not responsible for what the Israeli men do.

My best friend and I are entranced with the movement around us. We will cross no man's land and get home as if everything's simple. We make no claims on this place and thus buy our safe passage. We have other issues to resolve that don't come from race.

Jerusalem, I tell you, is a city made only for women. Only women deserve her soft hills, her low valleys, her night skies. Only we can keep peace when our anger's withdrawn from men's arsenals. Only we can be trusted with her old age, her frail shrines, her lost graves.

We walk up the hill to our side of the city and to unease. Though of one ethnic root we are not of these people nor are they of us. Our vision estranges us as it's done to women before us, and the problem's unsolved and walks with us wherever we go.

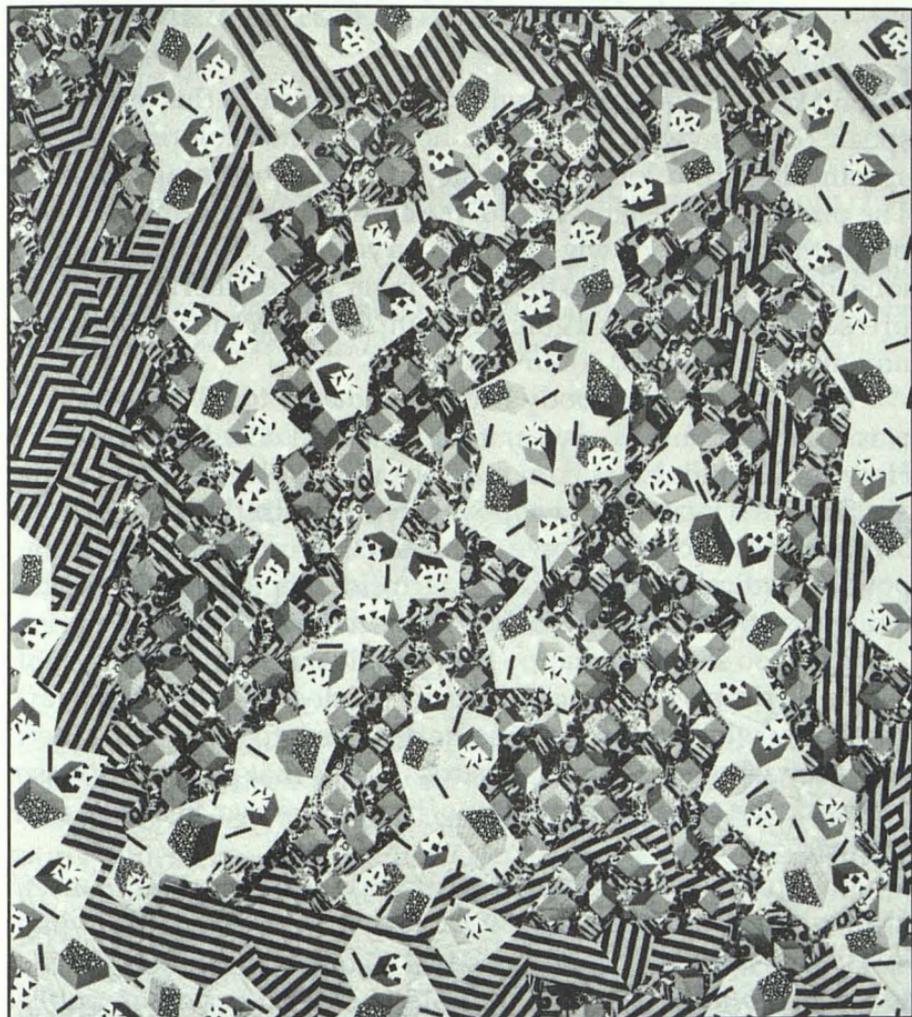


Photo: Jan C. Watten

October 17

Ellen Oppenheimer

1989, 73" x 64," machine sewn fabric, hand & machine quilted

Deb Parks-Satterfield

from Naps...The Politics of Hair
a prose/performance piece in progress

I Don't Know If You Can Relate

I don't know if some of you will be able to relate to this but I must speak of it anyway. You have no idea what colored people, specifically WE colored people go through concerning our hair! The problem of the hair, the do, the crowning glory, the rare, the patch, the kitchen, yo' wig, that stuff on yo' head ... yo' naps! Short, long, dyed, fried, layed to the side? Finger waves, Jheri curled, hot pressed or 'Fro. What's it gonna be huh? The search for a politically non-alienating hairdo continues.

Nappy hair. Somebody had the audacity to tell me my hair was out of style and if I'd wear it a little softer I'd look much better. How can the hair I was born with be out of style?

See, if it's too long and nappy then people be thinkin' you one of them bad bitches. People get scared. Think you some sorta political, radical, anarchistic, dyke, terrorist, hippie, commie, pinko, red slut ... that'll kill 'em in they sleep in the name a yo' people!

If it's too short and nappy then people think you some sort of exotic, African violet, mojo wearin' voodoo chile or they start askin' you why don't you cut some designs into it? ... and a Jheri curl, they should call 'em scary curls ... chile that's enough grease to fry a dozen eggs! Just lay strips of bacon 'cross yo' head, it's a lot cheaper!

If it's too long and straight then there you are breakin' yo' neck tryin' to toss it around and let it wave in the breeze like the white folks! Dreads? Out of the question! People be thinkin' there's somethin' livin' up in there, be 'fraid to sit next to you on public transportation! Dreads? That's just TOO political!

So here we are tryin' to snatch this stuff around every which way to suit what ever mood we happen to be in and match any and every occasion ... sheeeeet! ... we got to do somethin' folks! I am here today to tell you that I have put enough chemicals on this head to keep Johnson Products in the black till hell freezes over! Do you

hear me?! I say I have streaked, peaked and freaked this head, I have shaped, draped and scraped this head to the max and I say to you, sisters, it is time to give it a rest!

These days I wear my hair, how you say, au natural. No muss, no fuss, no bother. Cut as close to my head as it can possibly get without bein' BALD. I tell people it's political — actually — it's convenient!

Mabelle & Loretta's Tres Beau Salon of Beauté

(Door bell tinkles) (Mabelle, a sixty-ish, plump, black matron with some sort of elaborate pressed hair-do, is gazing at herself in the mirror. She touches up her make-up as Dinah Washington plays softly on the radio ... circa 1966.)

Child, what have you done to yo' head?! I told you not to go to Felicia's but no-o-o-o you was in such a hot hurry, now here you are wantin' Mabelle to fix it. Look at this mess! *(sniffs, recoils, mumbles "what did that woman put up in here?")* If you'd a come in when I told you ... they all go to Felicia if they in a hurry but if you want it done right you come to Mabelle and Loretta's ... uh huh. where doin' heads is an art!

Darlin', I can save you coif but it's gonna cost ya! Say what?! ... just a touch up 'round the edges?! Girl, ain't that much touch up in the world! You done put so much mess on this stuff it's dry as the Mojave! I bet you don't refill ice cube trays either. I said I bet you don't refill ice cube trays either. I *know* because yo' head is all dried up! What I'm sayin' is ... why does one refill an ice cube tray? Right! 'cuz you anticipatin' that next cold glass a Kool-Aid. Ngw, why do you grease yo' head? ... yes, 'cuz you anticipatin' that next big date or job interview or whatever. See, you got straw growin' out cha scalp and I bet there's empty ice cube trays in yo' freezer ... that's poor plannin' chile. This stuff needs to be shaved right down to the skull! You ain't Diana Ross you know. Now *THAT* chile got some hair... down to her ankles! ... no girl she be wearin' wigs on T.V, yes... it's all stuffed up under a wig. With hair like that?... yes she got to be part Indian, but she still cullud. Uh huh. She got real cullud

one night ... I read in JET ... yeah JET 'cuz Ebony don't never wanna tell the dirt! Nope, I don't even keep Ebony in the shop. There's only so many high-yellow Negroes, sippin' Crown Royal and leanin' on Cadillacs I can look at before I get mad ... now can I continue? Well ... like I was sayin' Miss Ross got real cullud one night, she got mad packed her husband's stuff and put the shit on the front porch! ... uh huh another quarter in the kitty, no cussin' in the salon. You do not have to remind me, it's my rule I made it up and I will follow it! (*drops coins in jar*) You wasn't even listenin' to me, you just waitin' to see if I'm gonna cuss! You better listen to me ... see that's what you need to do with that low-lifed reptile you been livin' with ... put his Black ass ... ass ain't no cuss word! No, it is not! They say it on T.V so it ain't a cuss word and I do not have to put any money in the kitty!... ass, ass, ass! Put his Black ASS in the street! Oh, puh-leeze, girl don't nobody care if he look like Billy Dee Williams or Sammy Davis Jr. for that matter. Lemme tell you somethin', back in the old days I was goin' out with this pretty dark-brownd skin fella, nicest lookin' man you ever wanted to see, could steal the sweetness from a cookie and not break it. I met him and got them peanut butter legs ... smooth brown and easily spread. First time I got ready to get into the bed he say, "Baby keep yo' hair on till we done." Well I thought he was just bein' cute, till he wanted me to sleep in that sorry ass wig every night! One evenin' I was standin' by the bed and as politely as you please I took off my wig, laid it on the pillow ... then my false eyelashes, all my make-up dumped that on the pillow too ... then finally, he didn't know about these ... my dentures! Laid 'em all right on the pillow next to him. I said, "You wanna fuck somethin', fuck that!" Fifty cent for that one! (*coins in jar*) See just 'cuz somebody look good and wanna jump up and down on you every night don't mean nothin'! Jealous? I'll have you know Loretta flips my switch on a regular basis! Not that it's any a yo' damn bizness (*coins in jar*) what the hell (*coins in jar*) we do! Shit! (*coins, coins, coins*) And just what have you got that Loretta and I ain't got? 'Cept all them little monsters and a blender you got on yo' weddin' day that don't work no mo'! Huh? What choo got? I got my shop, I got Loretta and I got no man under foot ... plus I ain't got to wear no wig which is what is gonna happen to you if you continue to patronize Felicia's!

(bell)

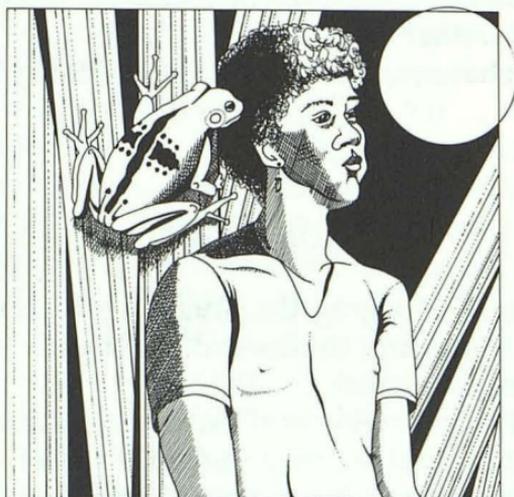
Miss Shapiro, how are you today? Go on in the back Juanita'll take care of you. What? Slow down Sister ain't no room in here for that mess! Her money is just as green as yours and her head is almost equally as nappy so ... those kinda people? Those kinda people, I'll have you know, keep my mortgage paid and my water runnin'! If it wasn't for their steady bizness I don't know where I'd be. You need to hush ... she comes in here for the same reason you do to try and straighten out her kinked-up, wooly, comb-destroyin' ... Well just go on and get a natural or a Afro or whatever the hell you call it (*coins*) I don't care! Y'all afro wearin' asses are puttin' me outta bizness slowly but surely! Back to Africa?... what do you think *you* know about Africa? BACK TO AFRICA MY BEHIND! Yeah, you and Marcus Garvey ... see you don't even know who that is! I'll tell you about Africa ... Africa walks through my door everyday sayin', "Do somethin' with my hair Mabelle — Felicia done messed it up!" Go on in the back and let Juanita wash that head! No, I like when you come in here with all yo' little off the wall ideas, makes my day more interestin'! Chile you get me goin' a hundred miles an hour! (*calls over her shoulder*) Juanita grease that stuff good now, we don't want no brush fires up in here! I'm sorry baby I didn't mean to call yo' children monsters, Unique and Motif are real sweet ... yes sweet ... o.k darlin' Juanita'll take care a you (*door bell tinkles*)

Child what have you done to yo' head?! I told you not to go to Felicia's ...

More Hair

after the yelling, the fighting, the struggling to get me *into*
the house, *out of* my dirty clothes and *into* the tub
my mother washes my hair
i let myself settle down into her all business no nonsense embrace
i close my eyes and put my head under the faucet
"wait, the water has to be just right, " she murmurs
i let myself be the sweet, submissive little girl she covets ... i
wait

the bathroom door is closed, me, mama, steam water
gently she massages shampoo and warm mysteries through
my hair
softly asking how did i get so dirty her small strong fingers
working up a lather i smile beneath her gaze, beneath the faucet
beneath the rivulets running down my eyes squeezed shut against
the stinging suds welcoming the smooth tender hands not raised
in anger or holding a whippin' switch
under the water time slows
we speak in low voices our breath hardly disturbing the moist
hot air
i lean against her pregnant belly as she rubs hair grease laced
with bergamot, for good luck, into my scalp and talks about
everything ... men, women, whitefolks, my step-father, the world
braiding intricate secrets she works the knowledge into my head
as she finishes the tip of the last braid, i look at the moon and wish
for more hair



June

Anahita 1989

June
Siné Anahita

What They're Missing

Zenith wonders where it will all end.

She punches the stamp marked Greenhill, NM 88473 onto the purple pad and then comes down hard, just to the left of the stamp on Florence's light bill. The pad softens her next blow and then she hits Jonas's letter to his son in California. Thud, stamp, thud, stamp, thud, stamp. The purple ink seeps into the cracks of the flat of her hand and makes it look like she has tiny varicose veins of the palm.

"Mail hasn't come yet," she says as Meryl's key opens the back door.

"Surprise, surprise," Meryl says. "It's only eight thirty. Chuck's here like clockwork at nine o five. You want some?" she asks, as she pours a cup of coffee from her thermos.

"Not me. I'm onto Tab now. Besides, I got to finish these." Zenith stops on the upswing and lets go a low whistle. "Would you look at that?"

"What?" asks Meryl, resting her chin on Zenith's shoulder. Her eyes drop onto a number ten envelope with hand colored pink and orange magic marker mountain peaks surrounding the address.

"They're doing it again."

"It's beautiful."

"Beautiful? Kidstuff, even worse. You and Hattie did better as children. Look at this one." Zenith pulls another from the stack. This time the mountains are turquoise with purple trim.

"Wow. They're so alive."

"They must be on LSD."

"Nah," Meryl says. She straightens up and goes back to her coffee.

"When have you ever seen Hudson Mountain turquoise?"

"Maybe that's the way it looks from up on that mountaintop."

"When they're on drugs, I tell you."

"They're just lonely girls with a lot of time on their hands."

"You like 'em, don't you?" Zenith asks, pushing her glasses back up her nose and putting the stamp and pad in the drawer.

Meryl stands, looking out the window. The slow curves of the river glint in hard sun, leading her eyes downstream where the

cliffs begin and the river disappears. "Yeah, I do. They remind me, a little, of someone..."

"Who?"

Meryl turns back to Zenith. "And I like those envelopes. It's nice to see a little color once in a while."

"Well, have you noticed the color of all those peculiar magazines they're always getting?" Zenith asked. "They all have plain brown wrappers. Does that tell you something?"

"They're mailers, Zenith, you know that. What's got into you?"

"I don't know why they couldn't hire locals for that lookout tower instead of importing strangers from somewhere, probably up north around Santa Fe somewheres, when we got such a high unemployment rate here —"

Meryl laughed. "Well, for starters, no one around here would be willing to walk twelve miles out to the road or live without running water and electricity."

"That's exactly what I mean!" Zenith said. "It's like the hippies all over again, only those girls are not hippies. They're — they're Satanists."

Meryl could tell by the screech in her voice that she wasn't kidding. She took a sip of her coffee to let Zenith know she was taking her seriously. "Satanists," she said. "What ever gave you that idea?"

"I think they're in some kind a cult. You ever looked at the names of those magazines?"

"None that I recollect, right off hand."

Zenith scowled and her black wig inched a little forward on her head, like it always did when she was going to clinch an argument. "Listen to this," she said, picking up the list she had written out for Preacher Tate. "Diary of the Crones," she said and arched her right eyebrow over at Meryl. But Meryl, in her white painter's pants and white cotton blouse and bowl cut hairdo, just shrugged. "That's another name for witches." Meryl's face looked blanker than one of the wrappers Zenith was waving at her, so Zenith went on. "Artemis' Army, Spinster Warriors — do you believe that one? I don't think it's a bunch of Army gals sitting around playing Old Maid, either. Daughters of the Amazon — Could be a South American cult."

"Doesn't sound Satanic to me."

Zenith looked at Meryl with the patience of a diamondback on a hot day. "All of 'em, without exception got this funny little stamp."

"So?"

"Don't play dumb with me, Meryl Ann Mc Callister."

"Zenith, I don't see anything Satanic —"

"Doesn't it seem funny to you that there's a circle above Christ's cross, an empty circle, the hollow, empty face of the devil right there on top??"

"It's a shame you didn't go into preaching yourself, Zenith. You could get a congregation worked up over nothing. That's a women's symbol, don't you know that?"

"A what?"

Meryl held one fist up in the air.

"What on earth are you doing, Meryl?"

"Remember women's lib?"

Zenith snapped her fingers "Of course! Why didn't I think of that? Women's lib, that explains everything! Those girls look like they crop their hair with rusty sheep shears and —" her voice dropped to a whisper — "their bosoms haven't been reined in since they were in a training bra." She looked down at the symbol again. "So that's what that means. Well, Mrs. Satan's stolen their souls for sure then."

"They're young girls, Zenith. They live a little differently than us. That doesn't make them Satanists. I don't think they're on LSD either and here's Chuck, praise the Lord, with the mail."

Chuck, slam bam, thank you, maam, brought in the new mail, threw it down, mouthed the words, I gotta go, grinned, took out the old mail and was gone. Meryl handed the heavy canvas bag to Zenith and poured herself another cup of coffee. Zenith flicked the new mail into the small box slots like she was aiming darts at a bullseye so Meryl said, "Think I'll go over to the store and get some gum for my run. You want anything?"

Zenith shook her head no like she was too busy to talk, but the truth was she was angry. What was this town coming to when Meryl could say, they just live a little differently than us? She swallowed hard. She did want a Tab to wash down her prickly throat, but right at the moment she didn't want anything from Meryl. She tilted her wig forward and said no to the soft hush of the door closing.

Lunchtime and she can finally close the window, but Zenith still has that tight lipped feeling like she could spit at anyone who looks at her sideways. She munches her egg salad sandwich. It feels

gritty in her mouth, like there is something between the bread and the eggs, something blown in in a dusty spring wind.

It has to do with those damn girls. Everytime she'd just about forgotten them and gotten back to being her old self someone'd come up to the window, and in the course of doing their business, ask if she'd heard from the girls on the mountain about any fires. Nobody's asked about Hattie and Lester and her grandkids in a blue moon, but the girls on the mountain, well. This business has her burning.

She throws the rest of her egg salad in the trash and reaches in her sack for the Little Debbies. This week she has the peanutbutter and chocolate wafers, her favorite. She pulls the packet out, and to her amazement the wafers are smashed, all of them, as smooth as little grains of sand. But the bag isn't broken. How could that be? Zenith feels a chill run down her spine. Her wig ripples on her head. Satan's work, sure as fire catching in dry grass.

Somehow the day went better after that. She had some of her best visits in months, better even than when Becky Talbot ran off with one of those boys from Georgia, here putting in the power line. "You can't be too careful," she said, and no one disagreed with her.

At four twenty Zenith heard the thump of Old Mrs. Jones's cane on the linoleum and went back out to the window. There was a girl there, tall as a soldier, and just as big and strong. Zenith could tell she was a girl because of the mammoth bosom that rested on the counter. She guessed the thumping had been her huge mountain boots. The girl clomped them a couple more times and hollered, "Anybody home?" before she saw Zenith.

Zenith felt that same cold tickle on her skin. The only other girls who came in with dirt on their legs and hair under their arms were the lookouts. If it hadn't been for the smashed Little Debbies, Zenith wouldn't have been able to muster up her end-of-the-summer-I-am-sick-to-death-of-tourists-smile. But now she was doing the Lord's work. She cleared her throat and smiled. "Can I help you?" she asked. The girl certainly looked like she needed some. She had to be over six feet, with brown muscly arms and the short short hair on her head sticking straight up. The Farthington's girl got a magazine that had pictures of rock and roll stars with hair like this, otherwise Zenith would have thought she was the victim of electric shock.

"Yeah," the girl said in a deep husky voice. "I need some directions.

Amen, Zenith thought, amen.

"I've got this friend who works in a lookout tower somewhere around here and I've got to find her—"

"Oh? Is there some kind of emergency?" Zenith asked a little hopefully.

"No, no emergency —"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Space."

"Space."

"Um-hm."

Zenith wasn't sure if the sensible thing was to send her on up the mountain or draw her out a little more. Who needed an alias in Greenhill, but someone doing the devil's work?

She and the girl were looking at each other the whole time Zenith was figuring, and the girl's eyes never wavered. Zenith could feel her own eyes wander back and forth from the girl's eyes to her dog bristle hair to her big sloppy breasts to the muscles in her arms and still the girl's eyes never moved. Get rid of her quick, Zenith thought. "Well you go up the mountain," she said, and just then she heard the deep rumble of Meryl's truck pulling into the drive. "I have to go now," she said. "The window's closed." She pulled the window down in front of the astonished girl and bolted it.

"Hey lady, wait a minute! Hey, open up!" the girl shouted. Zenith turned her back to the shut window and hummed loudly. Meryl came in and set down her sack.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"It's one of them!" Zenith said.

"Who?" Meryl asked.

"Them," Zenith said, throwing her thumb over her shoulder towards the mountains. Meryl looked at her like she hadn't heard her. "The Satan worshippers."

Meryl laughed. "Zenith, you've got to give that one up. I just gave Shelly a ride down here —"

"You gave her a ride??"

"Yes, I gave her a ride. She had two flat tires and an old girlfriend of hers is supposed to be coming here to hook up with her —"

The pounding stopped and the sound of laughter, the giggles of girls, came from the lobby. Zenith's heart quivered.

"How was your lunch today, Zenith?" Meryl asked, grinning. Zenith whirled around and looked at her. "Why do you ask?" Surely they haven't gotten Meryl too.

Meryl smiled and looked a little sheepish. "I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you. When Chuck threw in that sack of mail this morning it landed right on your lunch. I thought your Little Debbie cakes would be smashed to smithereens. Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Like what?" Zenith asks, trying to refocus. This is Meryl. Meryl.

"Like you got some kind of spook in your eye."

"For a minute there I — Meryl, you're going to think I'm silly."

Meryl smiles. "I already do," she says.

"No, I mean stupid, really dumb. I thought they'd gotten ahold of you," she said throwing her head towards the lobby.

Meryl looks at her and doesn't say a word. It's quiet out in the lobby now. There's nothing but their breath and the hum of the clock.

"I've known you a long time, Zenith."

Zenith swallows. "Yes, you have," she says.

"And I've never known you to be dumb."

"You're just saying that to make me feel better."

"No, I'm not, Zenith. I mean it."

The pounding at the window starts again.

"Mrs. Arthur, Mrs. Arthur —"

"That's Shelly," Meryl whispers. "She needs to buy some stamps."

"Did you see her friend?" Zenith whispers back. Meryl shakes her head no. "They're monsters. Satan's monsters."

The pounding on the window continues. Someone yells, "I know you're in there."

"We're trapped," Zenith says, eyeing the back door.

"Have you got your cross on, Zenith?"

"You bet," Zenith says, quickly reaching into her dress and bringing out the tiny silver cross.

"Well, I know you're smart enough to know that if Shelly didn't get me on the ride down, then she's not one of them — Right?"

"I guess so," Zenith says, giving her head a slow nod but holding the cross tighter.

"Take it from me, she's alright," Meryl says, nodding. When Zenith is nodding in unison she continues. "And what we've got

to do now, Zenith, is open up that window and take another look at the other girl. She might be okay too."

"But what if —"

"We've got your cross Zenith. Nothing bad happens to good people with crosses in their hands."

"But what about you? You don't have a cross and mine is too small —"

"I'm thinking of a cross in my mind, Zenith. I'll be safe." Zenith can't remember if Meryl's voice has always sounded this soothing. She clutches the cross and points it at Meryl and nothing happens. Meryl is still standing there, smiling at her.

"Now why don't you open the window and let Shelly get stamps." Zenith looks up at the clock: five past five.

"She couldn't have gotten here any sooner, Zenith.

"I don't want to set a precedent."

"Nobody else'll know."

"Well, all right," she says as she opens the window. "But just this once." She holds her cross out to the two girls.

"Hi, Mrs. Arthur, I'm sorry to bother you —" Conkwell begins. Zenith keeps the cross in front of her but nothing happens. The two girls are smiling at her. Their grins are so wide their faces look like they'll crack open. She sighs, and drops the cross to her chest.

The soldier girl puts her arm around Conkwell and pulls her tight. "I see you found your friend," Zenith says to her.

"Space, this is Mrs. Arthur —"

"We've met."

"— and behind her is Meryl. She brings the mail up to our box in Copperton. She's the one who gave me a ride."

"Hi," the girl says and sticks out her big strong arm with a hand for Meryl to shake.

"Hi," Meryl says, in a voice as husky as dawn on a hot day, in a voice Zenith has only heard her use with her daughter Hattie, before she married Lester and moved away. Zenith turns to look at her. The spook has moved to Meryl's eye. She shakes the girl's hand lightly and nods. The girls are so happy with each other they don't notice the tremor in Meryl's hand as she lowers it or the sweat beading up over her eyebrows, but Zenith does.

"How's Rogers?" she asks as she opens her stamp drawer. She looks up at the clock just to remind them, nods and then asks, "Had any fires lately?"

"A few," Conkwell says.

"That so," Zenith says. When she shuts the window she turns to Meryl. The spook still has a hold of her. She looks like cracked glass. Zenith puts her hand on Meryl's shoulder. "What is it hon, what is it?"

Meryl turns away and her body jerks a couple of times before Zenith realizes she's crying.

"Oh now," Zenith says. "Here, honey." She pulls the full weight of Meryl to her. "You cry now," she says. "That's it, you have a good cry." She hums to herself. She is glad to get back to her usual position, savoring someone else's foolishness. Her shoulder and neck are wet with tears and still Meryl's body trembles. "Honey, oh baby," Zenith says. "You been holding some of these for a long time. These ancient tears." She holds Meryl tight and rocks her like she did Hattie when she was a little girl.

"All my life I never —"

"Never, yes, uh huh —"

"Never," Meryl says between sobs.

"Never what, honey."

"I've never been loved," Meryl says and starts in again.

"Oh honey, think back when you were little, just the tiniest little baby, didn't your Mama an' Daddy love you then, didn't they want the best in the world for their little Meryl?"

"I'm not talking about that kind of love."

"Oh." The hum of the clock comes roaring in like a waterfall over dumb rock.

Zenith hums too, but she's stumped. Of course there aren't any men in town Meryl's age that are worth a hoot who haven't been married or killed off, but even when she tries to think back to any men in Meryl's past, there aren't any. Even the boys seemed to shy away from her, maybe because she was too much like them, big and husky, strong and shy. She never knew what to say to them, she used to tell Hattie. Come to think of it, Hattie was the only one Zenith's ever seen her get close to. Then in their junior year something happened, some girlish fight where they stopped speaking and suddenly there was Lester, his arm slung around Hattie's shoulder the same way that soldier girl had her arm around Conkwell.

Stop right there, Zenith hears her mind say. She is holding Meryl; Meryl, who she's known since she was a baby, in her arms,

and she is crying her eyes out because she's seen two women's libbers, one's arm around the other's shoulder. And she's never been loved.

Zenith swallows, but there is nothing in her throat. Meryl? Nobody else in town would have known what that woman's symbol was. Her Meryl, who she has her arms around? Her hand rubs across the strap of Meryl's bra but it does not console her. Meryl?

Zenith remembers her the summer after graduation, her uncle Gerald driving her to Lordsburg to catch the bus, a typing job waiting for her in the big city. When she'd come back a few years later and twenty pounds heavier there'd been that hollow look in her eye. She'd never talked about those days, except to say how good it felt to be back home where she knew everybody and everybody knew her. But as her sobs begin to soak into Zenith's dress and make the chain her silver cross hangs on lie damp on her neck, Zenith thinks of all that can happen to a young girl in a big strange city, all about Meryl that is unknown. Maybe she met some women's libbers and they — they what?

A hollowed out tree wouldn't feel any emptier. This is Meryl, practically her own little girl. Meryl, who she wants to be happy. Her arms tighten around Meryl, who is still sobbing, more like hiccups now or the soft sound of the river when the flood waters go down. Meryl, her soft face cradled into the place in her neck where she splashes Jungle Gardenia every morning.

"Honey, you got to get ahold of yourself. What say I take you home and make you some supper? Tonight's Chun King. You like Chinese?"

Meryl nods into her neck.

"Good," Zenith says, turning Meryl towards the door. "I'll have us a nice dinner then." She gently pokes Meryl in the soft flesh on her side. "Those girls don't know what they're missing," she says and closes the door behind her.

Wax Lips

You want the wax lips or the little bottles?

The wax lips.

O.K. Two wax lips, please.

I take the big, red, wax lips out of the tray on the counter and hand over the money.

No thanks, no bag.

I sniff the perfumey lips and push the sweet wax against my teeth. You are doing it too. These lips are irresistible.

I push away from the counter, my lips are in place. You are right behind me, your hair spraying out of your ponytail, and we duck around the bobby pin rack, giggling wildly with our teeth closed around our wax lips. The best part is turning around so that other people can see us, when we can stop giggling for a minute, which is hard.

Here come two women. Let's look at them.

And we look over our shoulders as if we were just regular, till our big red lips come into view, and they look startled and caught in our joke and we turn back to the bobby pins, giggling, satisfied, and push our lips back into place.

They're getting soft now. My mouth is warming them up and they taste sweet. It's hard not to suck them into my mouth already and chew on them, which comes next. But I actually like the way I look in them, they're like a mask, and I want to wear them a little longer. But they're getting sweeter and sweeter and you're already chewing on yours.

I suck them into my mouth, sweet and waxy and bulky and I remember with my mouth full that there's nothing you can do with wax lips once you've started chewing them and the sweetness is all gone, and the red color too, somewhere.

Perspective

It already wasn't being the best night; we had our usual act-right-at-the-dinner-table fight, and Ricky just kept it up all night with Dick and Lou. Ricky is my stupid little brother who hasn't figured out yet that you can't win with them. Dick and Lou are my folks. I call them that partly because it irritates them to death and partly because it's just so not *them*, you know. Richard and Louise definitely just do not dig it. I used to fight with them all the time like Ricky does. Now I just say, sure Dick whatever you say, and laugh. They don't know how to take me and mostly just laugh too.

Anyway they are not in the real world when it comes to teenagers so I have to go to bed at 10. To sleep, for christ's sake. So thank god for headphones, is what I say. Which almost got me in trouble that night, because it was a long time before I heard them calling me, just a teeny little shriek in the background of Shrunken Heads. When I finally caught on and pulled the phones off and hid them under the sheets Lou was bellowing right outside my door. They have this thing about politeness and knocking on doors, which is lucky. So I went out, acting all sleepy and crabby, and it was the phone. Which made my stomach drop, because all my friends know you don't call my house after 10:30 unless you're dying. I was right; it was Geri.

Geri and I have a lot in common about our folks. I mean it's where just relating to them is always this big ordeal. I mean it's sort of like you feel when you're walking down a long dark street by yourself at night. Like you know it's dangerous even if nothing's happening at the moment. But at least Dick and Lou don't hit me much. People always say words can be worse, but I don't believe it. So sometimes Geri calls me when things are really bad. She couldn't even talk to tell me what happened, she just kept sobbing and kind of choking, "I hate them, I hate them." Then I heard her dad screaming right by the phone and then it just crashed down. I had to think for a couple of minutes what to do. It was scary.

I didn't sneak out. I just didn't discuss it with them. I left a quick note: "Back soon, don't worry" (*sure*). Then I went straight

from the phone out the back door. I took Lou's car, that's the only one I ever get to drive. I let it roll to the bottom of the driveway before I started it, very secret agent. Then I went to get Sue. I knew I'd never do the whole thing by myself.

For a minute I thought she wasn't going to come, but she did. "My mom will kill me," she whispered. I mean please, what did she think D and L were going to do?

"Why do you think I'm playing Girl from U.N.C.L.E. down here? Will you please just get your ass into the car?" Sue's been taking care of herself longer than anyone I know. I think it's made her a little timid. But she's real comforting to be around. Solid and delicate at the same time, if that makes any sense.

We talked on the way over. Sue said Geri was thinking of running away, being a hooker. I didn't know that, but then it doesn't surprise me that she told Sue and not me. Sue had one of those great shoulders to cry on. Me, I get hysterical. I mean, I know kids do that kind of stuff all the time and maybe it's ok, maybe I'm a wimp, but it kind of makes me sick. I'll fight with Geri about that.

I said I was going to take Geri home to live with me, which is a little crazy. I mean even if Dick and Lou don't wet their pants, which they will, I'm not sure how Geri would go for being told how to brush her teeth all the time. It was a problem, but I couldn't think about it then.

We got to Geri's, which, even though it was past midnight, was all lit up and noisy from screaming and the tv. We found Geri in her room. Fortunately, her folks were screaming at each other down the hall and didn't hear us.

She was in a state, waving a knife and her hands all bloody. I freaked when I saw her hands, then she said she did it to herself, which partly made me feel better and partly really freaked me out. I know something about how you have to feel to hurt yourself like that.

We pulled her out to the car and I got onto the freeway and rolled the window down and screamed out of it like a rodeo rider. Geri and Sue were laughing; we were all a little hysterical. Sue started singing "Go Down Moses" and we all took it up, changing the names to our own teachers and folks and laughing to where we couldn't stop. Once when they were roaring out the chorus, I stuck my head out the window and yelled, "I love you both so much" into the wind.



I hate them I hate them I hate them so goddam much I don't what to do. I hate that they can make me feel like this. I feel so powerless. I am powerless. There's not a fucking thing I can do except kill myself. Sometimes that feels like it would feel so good, just slice myself up and flush myself down the toilet. I hate dad — he doesn't care what he says to me. And mom doesn't give a shit either — you'd think she might stand up for me. Mothers are supposed to fucking kill anyone who tries to hurt their kids. All she does is scream at me, "Now you've set him off again. Can't you ever act right?"

Although what "act right" means in this house is a question. Being nothing, being dead maybe. They'd probably find something to yell at me for if I was dead: "You little bitch, I'll teach you to bleed on my best rug."

I just hate their guts. The only thing that makes me feel better is to imagine bashing their heads in with an ax. Does that mean I'm gonna be just like them? I'll never be able to have kids. I'll never know what I might do to them. Fuck that, I'm gonna have kids so I can raise them right. I know what right is better than anyone with decent parents. I know what horrible parents can do to you. I'd rather die than be like them ...

Geris door slammed open, the knob punching a ragged hole in the wall behind it. In the doorway, her father stood, red in the face and breathing hard. "I knew it, you sleazy little schemer," his voice was loud, but measured, full of incisive scorn. "You sneak off here and write about how much you hate us." He was across the room in two steps, took a handful of Geris hair and pulled her head back. She felt herself start to sob, she hated how they could always make her cry. Helpless, she stared into her fathers face, inches from her own. He looked dark red and dangerous. White foam formed at the corners of his mouth as he screamed at her and when he said certain words, like "perfect" and "princess" a soft spray landed on Geris face. She closed her eyes and tried not to listen. Kill him, kill him, kill him, her mind repeated like a prayer.

Eventually he let go of her hair with a jerk and slapped her once across the face, almost casually, with the back of his hand. He left, slamming the door shut.

Geris sat heaving with sobs and anger until she felt sick. She bit the back of her hand until deep marks turned white, then red in her flesh. Reaching across to her desk, she tore open the drawer and pulled out her pocketknife. Without opening it, she grasped the handle and stabbed an imaginary blade into her pillow and mattress over and

over, her whole body behind each thrust. Then she opened the blade and almost defiantly buried it through the blankets into the mattress. It was a narrow sharp blade and the hole it made was invisible once she pulled it out. Dissatisfied, she searched the room, then with sudden decision closed her left palm tightly around the blade and pulled the handle quickly with her other hand. The sharp sting chilled her, but she smiled as she watched the bloodline form on her palm. She held her palm open for the other cuts, watching the clean white slices hesitate a second, then fill with blood. She felt calm, as if an emotion that was too big for her body was being released. As if, like air from a slow leaking balloon, she had eased the pressure inside herself.

The sound of footsteps in the hall startled Geri and she rolled over and lay on her stomach, hiding her hands under her. But when she heard the door open, anger overwhelmed fear and she whirled, raising her hands in front of her. "Get out," she screamed, "get out, I'll kill you."

When she saw Sue and May she laughed. Her bloody palms embarrassed her a little then, but she felt almost drunk with power and slightly proud of herself too. She actually felt lightheaded and staggered a little as they hurried her toward the door.

Once in the car, it seemed to her they were all drunk, with freedom and the impossibility of what they were doing. Sue wrapped Geri's hands and she felt comforted and healed, as if the crumpled bandanas were pure balm. She touched Sue's cheeks gently, then turned the gesture into a joke by starting to sing, "Oh Susannah, now don't you cry for me, I'm bound for Looziana, in Dick and Lou's stolen car." Soon they were all singing, filling the car with loud laughter that cushioned them as they slid along the dark silent highway. Geri felt safe, her arms around her friends' shoulders, enclosed with them in a small bright cell of present time.



May nearly scared me to death that night. I don't sleep too well, so she didn't wake me up exactly, but you don't expect your best friend to be throwing rocks at your window — if you hear rocks flying into your room, you think something awful, scary. But May has this Hollywood side, you have to tolerate it.

I had been up late helping Mom clean up the kitchen and making tomorrow's lunches. And listening to her troubles at work. It's hard on her working so hard and being a mom too. Sometimes

I wish things were a little more normal around here, but Mom depends on me. At least she doesn't let Dad come around any more. For a while there, it seemed like every time things got kind of settled down, he'd show up again, all sweetness and presents at first. Gradually he'd get whiny and depressed, like a rain cloud in the den watching tv all the time. Then either Mom would throw him out or he'd go off in a huff for another few months. Three years ago Mom said, "Enough," and I haven't seen him since, although one birthday in there he sent me a card. I don't think Mom likes men much anymore; she doesn't date or anything. Fine with me. I like taking care of her, though I worry sometimes how she'd get along without me.

So once I realized it was May and not some rapist or vampire, I was a little mad at her. I mean, I worry about Geri all the time, but what are we supposed to do? May was really scared though and that scared me; May's not always as brave as she acts, but she's not the nervous type either. Also her parents are *very* tight-assed. For her to steal their car to go driving around at a time of night she's not even supposed to be up reading in bed, things had to be serious.

I've never told anybody this, but sometimes I think Geri might kill herself. She's said some pretty desperate things to me. I told May she was thinking of running away to be a prostitute, but I didn't tell her how one time Geri and I stayed up almost all night talking about different ways to kill yourself. So I thought we'd better go try to do *something*, and I got dressed and sneaked out. I always feel guilty lying to Mom, she's so easy to fool because she never really pays too much attention.

At Geri's, things were really wild, tv blasting, people screaming at each other. I was terrified to go in, but we didn't see anybody until we got to Geri's room. She'd cut her hands all up with a pocket knife, it was sickening, and she was wild, laughing like she was drunk, but it was just feeling she was drunk on. I just wanted to get *out* of there before her parents came in, Geri was laughing so weird and May was trying to have a conversation with her, for god's sake. I practically had to drag them to the car.

It was funny though, once we were in the car, I felt really happy. Not the least bit worried, though god knows there was still enough to worry about, like how we were ever going to explain all this. But, for a while, it just didn't matter, not at all, and I felt like the most powerful person in the world.

One, Two, Three

After a long winter's depression, I look out at the light through the pouring rain and feel almost grateful to be alive. Another seasonal depression lived through. I don't know what my chances are — might kill myself next January, but I am sure I will make it through the summer anyway. I ponder this aliveness, this spring light and wonder how long I'll have to kiss ass this time to get grounds privileges. They don't like attempters up here — too much distraction, might have to hurry to an actual patient's — no, forgive me, resident's — actual need. Might have to explain to a distraught middle-class parent how their seventeen year old (that they had given up on at thirteen) has been allowed to die in this barren hospital room. Shit, I want a cigarette and some sex. The first time my genitals have felt anything in months. I tentatively touch myself. Not wet but that's a lot to ask after so many months. I start to fantasize in earnest. Perhaps coming can startle me into wanting to do something with this spring lease on life. Somehow get out of here and by God I'll never be back in here again.

I lift myself off my knees and back toward the door. Later, in the day room, a cinder block envelope for a scarred television and tired plastic chairs, I bum my first cigarette of the day from Vivian. Vivian, whose husband sends cigarettes every week so he won't have to visit. Viv and I agree it is a good trade-off.

Vivian helps me make a plan to get grounds privileges again. First of all, I must stop trying to palm my meds and getting caught. Next I must voluntarily write or call my parents (oddly enough, staff considers voluntary contact with family the highest good here; more proof that they don't give a shit about my mental health), and finally I must tell my doctor that I have some goal. We decide that's enough work for one day — we'll think of the goal later. It can't be to lay the new night nurse or have three Mr. Goodbars for lunch.

I begin my campaign at noon. I thank the nurse for my meds. She merely raises an eyebrow. The day nurse is so cynical. I will not let her fucking attitude keep me from following steps one, two and three: I'm outta here. I retire to the day room in my required long-timer's shuffle; a combination of meds and hopelessness make it

physically impossible for any of us to lift our feet from the floor. I sit in one of the drooping orange chairs, I never sit in the green ones. I try to think of what I will say to my parents in my voluntary communication. Well, I'll have to avoid the TOPICS, that's for sure. That leaves the weather and international politics. Has anybody here got a *US News and World Report*? My father's fondest fantasy is to invade some small Latin American country and get to kill a few communists or leftists or rightists or anybody who can reasonably be construed to be the enemy — except me, I'm the real enemy, but he can't dress in camouflage and machine-gun me. Oops, maybe international politics are out after all. How long can we discuss the weather? Hopefully for ten minutes or so. I look up at the small square window — no bars. No, we're much too modern for that, but just you try to break that safety glass. Even a large crazy couldn't do it, let alone my skinny self. It is still dripping outside. I heard one of the evening shift orderlies say there are flash flood warnings. Rain, rain, rain — that ought to be good for two or three minutes of voluntary communication.

Bev comes by and grabs my hand — I've been picking my cuticles again; I look at my bleeding finger tip. I do still bleed, that must prove something. I wonder if cuticle picking counts against me as far as grounds privileges go. Probably every goddam thing counts against me, including the head nurse's having a fight with her bitch lover. She hates it that I saw them out necking behind Our Place one night. She must have been really blasted. She laughed when she saw me watching. Now that I'm back in, she nearly pops a cork every time she sees me. I know the lady's a dyke, and she's afraid I'll try to blackmail her or start some shit on the floor. Like I don't have any goddam morals at all. Besides, who the hell would listen to me? Head nurse is a lesbian says the notorious baby dyke juvenile delinquent schizophrenic. Hoo, I'm sure the *New York Times* is waiting for that hot lead. Crazy lesbians, one and all.

I promise myself if I'm nice to her, despite her attitude at night meds, I can masturbate after lights out — if I don't fall asleep from the meds before I can think up a good fantasy.

I walk to the pay phone and stare at the black and silver dauntingness of it. They are at the other end. Waiting, waiting for me to call, to show signs of being normal. They, who burned all Trice's letters, who keep locking me in here, who hate me, wait nuclear-like in a subdivision of hell for me to wander back to the

fold, innocence restored, heterosexuality achieved, hair washed. No, I'm not ready. Got to get in a better frame of mind. Neither screaming nor standing frozen count as voluntary communication. The phone is right across from the nurses' station so they can watch, and hopefully hear all patients' — no, residents' — attempts to make real (as opposed to delusional) contact with the outside world.

I bum a cigarette off Georgia, the only decent orderly on days. I smoke it in the short hall outside the OT room. My fingertips, all sore from chewing my cuticles, bump along the cinder-block wall. I look down at the cheap tennis shoes mom brought the day after they put me in the last time. Brought me down here without my damn shoes. I'll bet Lisa doesn't wear cheap tennis shoes. She's probably got Reeboks or British Knights. Lisa is the good daughter. No, shit, I can't think about Lisa, or I'll never make this goddam call. Got to get up for this, think about grounds privileges, think about being gone, think about calling Trice from the outside.

"Hey, Mom, how ya doin'? ... Oh, yeah, when's he get back? ... Great. How's Lisa? ... Yeah, I miss her special apple cake. The food here's not too great ... Sure, sure I know it's nutritional. Hey, Mom, I'm working on some goals now ... Well, like working on my GED, getting some job training, stuff like that ... Okay, don't want you to miss General Hospital. Tell Dad hi. I'll talk to you later."

Great! Two birds with one stone. Talking to my mother who couldn't give a shit about my voluntary communication made me think of goals constipated enough to please my psychiatrist. Now all I have to do is wait for the staff to notice that I am a changed woman and let me out on the lawn.

My next appointment with Dr. Rather is next Friday. Viv and I practice what I will say to him and how I will say it. Dr. R is Viv's doctor, too, so she has the skinny on what kind of stuff he likes. We make a plan. One, two, three — I'm outta here.

"Hi Dr. R, how are you today?"

"Fine, Heather, and you?"

"Oh, I'm pretty good. Felt pretty good this week. I had a nice talk with my mother."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yeah, we talked about how Lisa's doin' in school, her cooking class. We talked about my dad. And we discussed some realistic goals for me to be working on."

"What kind of goals did your mother have in mind?"

"Oh, really it was my idea, I just wanted to bounce it off her before I asked you if it was okay. I thought that since they had the classes right here at the hospital and all, I'd just as soon start trying to get my GED certificate. You know, since I have such a hard time staying in school and all."

"That sounds like a good goal. What would be your first step toward accomplishing that?"

"I guess I'll ask Ben, the OT guy, if he'll take me down to social services to get signed up. Isn't that what I do?"

"Yes, or one of the floor nurses could help you with that, too."

"I guess I'll ask Ben, since he's sort of taken an interest in my education and all."

"Well, that sounds like progress, Heather. You work on that and we'll see how you are doing a week from today." He was standing up so I'd leave. Shit, I didn't have all my plan out yet.

"Uh, Dr. Rather, there's something else, too."

"What it is Heather?" He looked down at his watch. Probably some damn golf date. He had golf trophies all over his office.

"Uh, I thought since Mom and I had such a nice talk, I'd like to plan for a weekend pass home soon."

"Well, that may be possible down the road some. You'll need to take some steps to show you are ready for that." He stood again.

"Just one more quick thing, Dr. R. I've been looking out at the buds on the trees and that really cheers me up. Do you think I could have grounds privileges?"

He pulled the white prescription pad out of his top drawer and scribbled. He handed it to me and nodded toward the door.

"Thanks, Dr. R, see you next week."

When I got out into the hall, I read what he had written. "Outdoor privileges, grounds only."

Mission successful!

The thing, you see, about my, um, problem is that it's real seasonal. The depression part. The lesbian part isn't a problem, only my family thinks so. Even Dr. Rather says that there are some well-adjusted lesbians. Probably more than there are well-adjusted psychiatrists. Anyway, I get really down in the fall and winter. It feels like when there's no sun I can't hardly think or feel anything but sad. I swear, it just goes away in the spring, when the sun comes back and I feel it soaking into my skin.

Others seem to treat seasons as a backdrop — as an excuse to vacation in another part of the country or the world. They act as if the whole world around them isn't withering and dying as they throw Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Superbowl parties. Celebrating that they live while everything else dies. How can half a planet think a savior could be born in late December? No one understands. People, especially my family, often think it's the holidays themselves that depress me. My parents tell me not to expect so much from Christmas. But then they buy a Christmas tree and kill the only thing with enough stamina to be green in cold white December. I've watched it grow drier and browner as January drew near. What did have the courage to live, my parents kill.

I can't believe the grass feels so soft, so alive under my feet. So different from pacing the halls. The floor of Two West is dead, something more than dead, super dead. But here the air is softish and humid. Wet, but not oppressive — caressive. The trees are so still, not a breeze anywhere. The gray sky looks perfect against the spring green of the trees. I refuse to look at the dead red brick to my left. I had grounds privileges once before; I lost them by screaming at an old lady and giving her the finger. Turns out she was the wife of a board member here to do her monthly volunteer work.

Anyway, I remember the shortest distance to a spot not visible from the gate house is to the left of the main building. Out past Maple Cottage and Oak Cottage. Those are little house-like affairs for the real long-termers. I trudge that direction trying to look bored with all this living green and like I'm coming out of my depression intent on being a good girl. I hear laughter from Maple Cottage. Not the laughter of someone sharing a good joke with a friend, nor the maniacal laughter of the truly-out-of-touch, but that half-laughter of someone pretending they remember what it was like to be amused.

I sit under the tree waiting, waiting to get the energy to face the night alone and with no particular place to go. Maybe I'll go try car doors until I find one unlocked. I sure don't relish sleeping outside; it looks like it might rain again. Shit, freedom means having no goddam place to sleep and no money to eat on. I put my head down in my hands and stare at the dirt and grass between my knees. I'm so tired and my feet hurt inside my squishy tennis shoes. Worse and worse, gloom and gloom. It is the wrong season for depression. I get up and start walking north on 117.

Country Cafe, the place still has several people eating lunch. The curtains are red gingham and the screen door shuts with a loud aluminum bang. I walk in trying to see everything at once. Not knowing exactly what the danger looks like, it is difficult to see it. I sit down at the counter and pull a plastic-coated menu from between the salt and pepper shakers. Coffee is fifty cents. The only other item for under a dollar is a bowl of oatmeal. Coffee and oatmeal it is. The floor is grayish tile and the counter top was red when it was new. Now it is pink with spots washed completely white. The waitresses wear their own shirts and jeans but have matching Country Cafe aprons. Then I see it, a help-wanted sign beside the cash register. When the older waitress comes to take my order, green pad in hand, I ask what kind of job is available. She says dishwasher. I ask for an application form. She snorts, "Honey, we don't have application forms — you want to wash dishes, you talk to Maidie. Do you want anything to eat or just a job?" I quickly order coffee and oatmeal and ask how I might talk to Maidie.

"Eat your breakfast first, then I'll get Maidie for you."

After I wolf down my oatmeal and finish my second cup of coffee, the waitress leans over the counter at me. "You want some toast or something? You still lookin' hungry to me."

"No thanks, that's enough for me."

She looks at me skeptically. "You ate that oatmeal like it might get away from you — unless Raeann is putting something new in the oatmeal, I'd say you were pretty hungry."

I just grin and hope she'll get Maidie. I sure as hell don't want to tell her that after paying for the oatmeal and coffee, I don't even have a quarter to tip her, let alone buy more food.

"Okay, have it your way. Come on back and I'll get you Maidie." I follow her back behind the cash register to a tiny office completely filled with the largest woman I have ever seen. "Hey, Maidie," says the waitress, "this kid wants to have the dishwashing job." She smiles at me and goes back to wipe off the counter. Maidie turns her head and glances at me. "Go on out and sit at a table. I'll talk to you in a minute." I trail back out to the front and sit down at an empty table for four. The tablecloth is plastic, red gingham to match the curtains. Sort of a homey look. I'm playing with the salt shaker to avoid biting my cuticles when Maidie comes out. She towers over me. Damn, I'd sure hate to get on the wrong side of this woman. She looks like she could level the place if she took a mind.

"So, what's your name?"

"Uh, it's Heather."

"Have you ever worked in a restaurant before?"

"No, but I've washed lots of dishes at home." I stare at my knuckles and hope that isn't as dumb as it sounds. I catch myself before my left middle finger gets into my mouth. I scratch my chin to explain my hand's mysterious journey toward my face.

"What kind of work have you done?"

"Uh, well, I worked in a hospital recently."

"Doing what?"

"I was an orderly. Mopping floors, carrying boxes, bedpans, that stuff."

"Why'd you leave that job?"

"Well the hospital smell was beginning to get to me. And the crazies were giving me some shit, too."

"You worked at Ritenour?"

I nod.

"Did you know Marcy Palmer?"

"No, what department does she work in?"

"She works down in supplies. She's an old friend of mine. Worked there for years. Everybody knows her."

"Oh, well maybe we worked different shifts."

Maidie looks at me. I can't tell if she believes me or not. I sure as hell hope she doesn't call Ritenour to check my story.

"You got a place to stay?"

Oh, shit, she's on to me for sure. How the hell did she figure it out? "Not exactly."

"Folks kick you out?"

"No, my girlfriend." I glance up at her eyes — no reaction.

"There's a cot in the box room you can use until you get your first paycheck. It's hot as hell in the summer, but you'll be out before the worst. If you keep your nose clean and work hard, I'll see that you're okay until you get back on your feet. Can you start right now?"

"Oh, yeah, great. Thanks a lot, Maidie, I really appreciate this. I'll do a good job. I will."

She stands up and starts for the kitchen. "That's okay, Heather, I've lost a few girlfriends myself."



Katy
Beth Karbe

Frances Negrón-Muntaner

the wait

to l.c.

*of all the stories
i created this memory*

You can't imagine
your trained back could not carry
all the fantasies
i kept in my purse
when at last i met you
to know you was to want
the solitude
the intimacy
of when we abandon something
or we are abandoned

i know of your arduous work
to avoid being touched by anything
not even by the edge
of the blade
which you carry sideways on your hips
confusing it with the softness of fresh fruit
i know of your fragility
which is made of salt mostly during the night
when the threat is not of bullets
but of shy and consistent raindrops
threatening to dissolve your gaze

i know you in your scattered intelligence
without aim
which is my own daily agony
of possessing the right instinct
and lacking the needed
mosquito net

we don't need to speak too long
desire has been solved between our bodies
with a glance
we will read what is ephemeris in our destinies
and readily forget this encounter:

the obstinate need to satisfy
our story's ending
my body will arrive at your house
with the aura
of distance, sea and nostalgia
the muscles of my chin
will be absent
because not even then
will you invite me to strip off my leaves
over your face:
at twenty i am impatient
and for having jumped over so many steps
i am old
i beg that your stubbornness
does not delay you
repentance can be perverse
when something is promised
and only essences are as lightweight
as verse
which however
step by step
in my life without scents
have become very heavy

espera

a l.c.

*de los tantos cuentos
inventé un recuerdo...*

no te imaginas
no podría tu espalda entrenada cargar
todas las fantasías
que en mi cartera llevaba
cuando al fin te conocí
conocerte fue querer un poco
las soledad
la intimidación
de cuando abandonamos algo
o somos abandonadas

sé de tu arduo trabajo
para que no te toque nada
ni siquiera el filo
de la navaja que sobre tus caderas cargas
confundiéndola con la dulzura de una fruta fresca
sé de tu fragilidad
que es de sal sobre todo en las noches
cuando la amenaza no es de bala
sino de tímidas y consistentes
lluvias disolviendo tu mirada
te conozco en tu inteligencia dispersa
y sin objeto
que es mi misma angustia diurna
de poseer instinto y carecer de mosquitero
no tenemos porqué hablar demasiado
tenemos resuelto el deseo en nuestros
cuerpos
y con mirarnos
leeremos lo efímero del destino
y olvidaremos este encuentro:
caprichosa necesidad de satisfacer
el final de un cuento
llegará mi cuerpo a tu casa
con el aura
de la distancia, el mar y la nostalgia
tendré los músculos de la quijada
ausentes
porque ni aún entonces
me invitarás a deshojarme sobre tu cara:
impaciente yo a los veinte años
y vieja de tanto saltar etapas
ruego que por tu terquedad no tardes
puede ser perverso el arrepentimiento
cuando se promete algo
y sólo las esencias son tan livianas
como el verso
que sin embargo paso a paso
en mi vida sin olfato
se me han hecho muy pesadas

Eidetic Images

Tonight, no place would be desolate enough
to quiet my desire for her.

The endlessly deep night sky,
the knowledge that everything, like fire,
cannot be touched and held,
reminds me of how she left me, wanting.

Can you tell

I sleep with you and think of her?

It has been years now,
but too often, I dream she's come for me,
her every gesture shaped by desire
she can't imagine ending.

I listen to you, wondering what she might say.

I wake, surprised your hair is not a darker shade.

Remember where we sat beneath the jasmine vines?

The flowers, each a tiny star, kept falling,
their scent thicker than the humid air.

That's where I met her; we sat watching
the gnats become dark pillars of smoke
as they mated above the trees.

I spend my days remembering all I could forget:

how she turned towards me in the morning,
eyelids swollen from sleep,

how she could leave me stirred,
as buds feel, surrounded by warm air.

By leaving, she has kept me faithful;

I'm full of the emptiness of her not being here.

In my one photograph of us, she stands holding me.

We lean together, trying to touch the sun's burning.

SDiane Bogus

Her Son

A Story of Lust and Possession in Lesbian Passion

After we make love that way I always think of him, her son. Something in her resistance to me, however natural, makes me think of him. He is nowhere to be seen in our lives. He has no name, no face, but he is alive somewhere, somewhere himself wondering. ... Like I always wonder about him.

I'm talking to you about it because it's safer. Remember when I started therapy I said I wanted a therapist who'd dealt with gay people and didn't try to change them? I wanted one who understood the internal dynamics in our relationships. You fit the bill. Private, honest, clear and friendly — that's you. God, we've waded through a lot here — my break-ups, the ways I'm co-dependent, my incest issues, and my general need to nurture myself. Five years. Holy smoke — we've come a long way ... I've come a long way! A new me — whole and in charge. Now I've even got a new lover. That's why you haven't seen me in awhile. I came today as a way to nurture myself, to talk to myself with someone listening who won't judge me, or make me feel I shouldn't be talking about this, who won't put my business in the street. To someone who has no politic about this.

This? She and I talk you know, but this is different. What would I look like saying I'm afraid of her son? Well, not quite afraid of him. I resent and envy him. I resent him for the place of secret pain he left her; I envy him for his existence, for being an extension of her before me, beyond me. And I resent his doggish father for preparing the way.

Okay, okay. I'll be specific. But it's hard. It's hard. You see, she was raped. Taken by that sonofabitch fireman in her own house, in the middle of the day. Thirty years ago. It was thirty of *her* years ago but I feel it. And it feels like it was yesterday. When I lie on her belly, my nakedness sealed with hers in a black aura of connection, when I peer into the darkness of that connection, I know her pain, and I know it may take the rest of her life to allow me to love her fully with my hands all over her body, in every opening, like my tongue probing her, caressing her with abandon ... You're right, I'm getting poetic again.

What I mean is when we make that kind of love there's always unspoken reminders of her past in the bed with us. That kind of love? It's the kind where I want to grab her up in my arms, squeeze her tightly, pin her to my breast, allow her no retreat, make her my sexual prisoner as if she is bound by my will. It comes over me like that. I don't know if it's the impulse of conquest or the impulse of fierce passion. But when I feel like that and I try to make it so, most of the time, I find her stiff and hard to move to my desire. She won't submit. That's okay because I want to have her fight me, and give in to me all at once. I want her to yield to me, to pretend to accept what she cannot control. But it hasn't happened quite yet. It's complex. Here's the real catch. I do want to take her and move her to my will, but I'm always afraid of the feelings when I want to make love like this. I mean is it okay to want to make love like this? I don't want to do what the fireman did. I mean he tore into the inner life of her body and strode unwelcome into the sanctuary of her virginity, violated her solitary wholeness, her oneness, and split her like a block of wood. Poetic again? I know. I know, but can you believe, she was twenty-eight, never been to bed with anyone, never. A precious precious woman. And she was pretty. I've seen photographs of her smiling back then, standing in country fields with cows and bulls, her curly hair caught in a playful breeze that was passing over the farm. Her half-Cherokee half-African face red gold, her eyes set deep like a seer or a monk. Her unmolested smile broad as the milky way of light in her eyes. A beauty. She still is, but now, she's more handsome than beautiful — the power of age and self-control. I like to think it's a way she recast her face to the dismay of men, and for the seduction of women.

Anyway, when I feel like making love to her in that way, you know, possessing her body with abandon, with my dread power of sexuality, I pull up short for fear I might be acting out some secret wish to dominate her, to take her against her will, to control her or make her an object of my fulfillment. That's not the whole idea. I want to submit to her as well ... I do submit to her, but it's hard getting the same back as I give. No, we never talk about it. That's why I came here today. I'm not safe talking about it. See, before she and I became lovers, and since I saw you last, I've begun to masturbate — more correctly mistressbathing — and think about being taken against my will by a man. It is so hot and juicy and rough — and easy. Now, I wouldn't tell anybody this. After all, I'm a lesbian. It's politically incorrect to think

like that. So I've lived my secret sex life alone for years. It's not the only fantasy I have; I have lots of others, some worse, some sweeter, but that one is a favorite among favorites. Anyway, what I'm saying is I feel guilty in two ways when I come to bed with her. I feel I ought to not want to have sex in a way that reinforces the negative sexual behavior, that is male-identified in its aggressiveness and in its attempt to dominate a woman. It is self-hating or woman-hating or something — isn't it? Or is it a kind of conditional vulnerability built into sex?

Oh, not for any pain. I want to make her feel good. I want to feel good, but still, I want her to do it my way some of the time. To let me control her, have her my way would be such a kick. But like I said the guilt, the guilt creeps in, and when it does, I don't let go, and I feel she can't let go either, though she tries. So, I feel guilty for wanting to and trying to play out this scenario. And even when we almost do, like we did last night, I come away feeling I've touched something deep and untouchable in her past and in my psyche that must be watched and kept back, kept secret.

How does she act? She says she's trying to feel me, and get the fullness of the experience. She holds me and moans to my explorations and squeezes, to my strokes and grinds, but when I enter with my thumb, it never really pleases her. She's been shut down for years. She's never had it normally — I don't mean that — I mean, she's never had sexual intercourse that wasn't rape. She's never let women touch her that way either. Always before me, she did the loving, the pleasing. She had the control and the power of a woman's pleasure in *her* own touch. She's been the consummate bulldagger, her loving the fiercest, most well-practiced. She's the most self-contained woman I know. It's powerful. I swear it's powerful. When she takes me in her arms, I want to surrender to her strength. I damn well better. But what does it all mean? It's all so confusing. I can't sort out the garbage I've learned from the world and what I really feel.

Yes, we do love each other. The other ways we show it? We cook for each other, we buy each other little gifts, we hug and goose each other or give each other a feel or caress when we pass by. We sleep touching. We groom each other. I take care of her feet (because I'm so happy she walked into my life) and she massages my back because it's the first place she ever touched on my body. We... Well, it's good to know you see us as healthy. That is very good to know. Still, what about this thing, this thing with her son, my obsession of remembering the fireman, and wanting to take her myself?

I can't talk to her; I can't. That's why I came here. You know me. You know how my mind works. I've been talking to you for years now. I trust you. No, I don't want to believe her son will ever really show up. How could he? She made sure he wouldn't. He probably doesn't even know he was adopted. But what if he does know? Wouldn't he wonder why she gave him up? Or want to know what his biological parents were like? Even though he's thirty years old now, and probably married with children himself (or if her genes were stronger, he may be gay), his mind still wonders about her I'll bet. And I know she wonders how he turned out as well. She never says it, but I can tell. She takes an interest in everybody's kid — baby to teen. We can't go anywhere that she doesn't fawn over somebody's son or daughter. It really bothers me to think that both of them are somewhere in the world carrying secret longings for each other yet lost and unknown to each other. And maybe, just maybe some day the psychic connection will lead them to each other and disrupt my life with her. I know I'm extrapolating a lot. That's why I really wish I didn't know about him. I wish I didn't know he'd been born.

You see that's what really bothers me the most. The fact that she had a baby. That she had a baby for a man, *that* man. And I hate it. I hate it. I do. I hate it. I want her to be untouched, without children like me. The one-of-a-kind unflawed lesbian woman. It's silly I know, but I think a real bulldagger wouldn't have a baby for a man. A real bulldagger could make babies — parthenogenesis extraordinaire. That's how tough she is. She makes babies. Okay, okay, I'm joking. No, I'm not joking. What I really feel is displaced or unfulfilled or left out, or something ...

I never had a baby. I never wanted one with a man. I can't now. I had a hysterectomy some years ago. Oh, I don't grieve that. I grieve being able to have a baby for her. I want her child in the worst way. Unreal, I know. But when she makes love to me, whether she's wearing a dildo or not, I want to open like a valley and let the waters of her spirit wash over me, wash into the very center of me and deposit her essence, like streams from rivers collect in ravines. I want to carry something of her with me like a prize and a symbol, like proof. Or if not that, I want to give her *my* baby. ... I've never told anybody that, except her.... You don't have to thank me, that's how I trust you.

I guess I'm jealous or envious, huh? I'm the woman who never had a son by rape or by love. I never gave a woman one either. Men have baby-making over us, but not with each other. If they can live

with the limits of nature I guess I can, too. Besides, I would not have wanted to have a son. I don't envy them or her that; me and pain are unacquainted. I can hardly stand a hair in my eye, a mosquito bite. That she or any woman has had a child is a miracle of endurance. I envy her that. But I hate the man who took her, who forced his will on her beyond reason and consent. And he has made something in her, with her that is irrevocable and haunting. It is in the bed with us every time we make love. It is the specter of lack of choice, and the congregation of dismissed pain sealed between us on those hot nights when we come to the place where my and her love might make something new, a child of our own from the fierce conjunction of our will and kisses, the juices that flow from us. It's knowing that what he did cannot be undone, nor ever fully healed. And I would heal her or, at the very least, myself.

I need to heal *something* so I can have her without these recognitions and guilt. I want her for myself, to myself. I am greedy for her. Selfish. I want her to be able to give me her love with no constrictions of memory, with wet and seeking trust. I want that. You really believe that she will? That's good to know. I mean it's really good to know. Thank you. Thanks a lot. Yes, I can see how she's growing, trusting me. I can trust the process to free us to really come together, but, but what if her son should show up?

Okay, okay, okay, I know. We'll deal with that if and when it happens. I have to quiet my imaginings and trust. It's been good just airing these buried and secret feelings. I wonder if other gay people feel this way? So you believe everyone grapples with issues of lust, control and aggression. That's a thought. But doesn't being gay magnify it? I mean as a lesbian I'm even more sensitive to my own internalized heterosexual behaviors. I spend my life trying to separate them from me, the negative in their culture from the positive. I wrestle with what's really male, what's really female, what's powerful, what's weak, what's control, what's vulnerability, and when and how to be these things. Talk to her about it? But I just told you, I'm afraid.... Okay, okay, I'll do it, but look for a call from me if it doesn't work. God, I hope she'll understand. Be positive? Okay, okay. She will understand because we'll talk just like this. Remember, I may not be back — it's your income. But then, we're friends, too — so call me if you get lonesome.



Self portrait — Butch-Femme
Elise Dodeles

Winifred E. Eads

Durable Rustproof Saturday Night

20 October, 1984, Durable Rustproof Saturday Night up to her ears in harlequins and full of seabody roars half-tilt sunnysideup and prancing, she slides devil rings on her fingers, she side-swaps shadows, she teems with trouble, she sells trouble to passing itinerant farmers from out of her back kitchen door, they tip their hats to her, they tell others, she picks up trade;

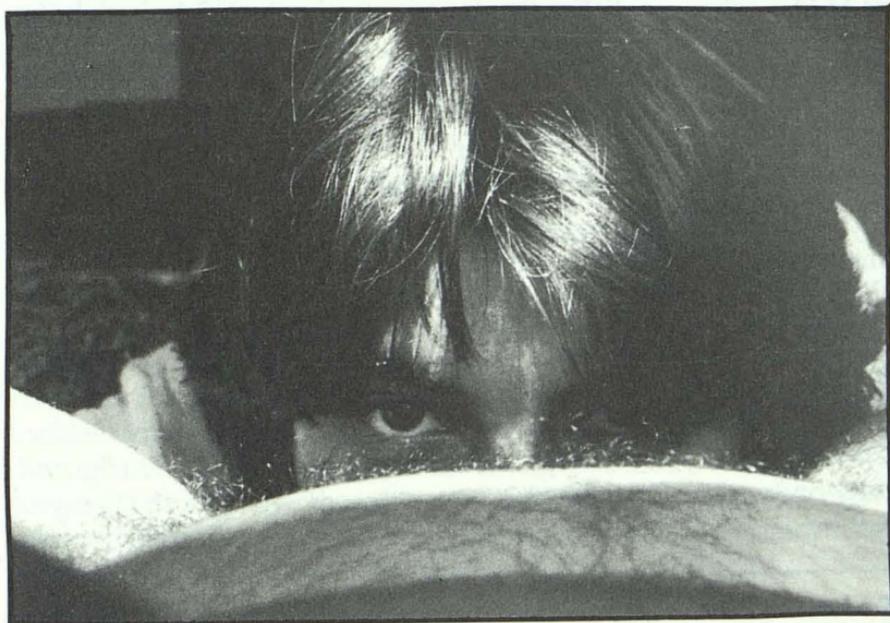
from out of her front door she operates a waystation inn for traveling sick children who mew and spew. She cures them with herbs and whatnots, she cleans their gills, she pulls out splinters; one by one she wraps each child in scars and they lie with their eyelids under quilts while she plays music on spheres on baby grand pianos that she seasons in her magnificent rose upholstered basement below her;

on the other hand she's an ironclad megaphone woman loose on the streets of big cities, she gathers personages into convoys and takes them out to a site in northern Nevada where they are allowed to let loose the white strings that bind up their jubilation into bundles of dread. She calls this her off-hand charity work. If you peer into her eyes you see concentric rings of scarlet patinas that look like a series of galaxies in motion;

if you ask her to give an accounting of herself she speaks in whizz like a pinwheel in the hands of a small child on a crowded late afternoon rush hour city bus:

"oh yes, it's me moving in red heats across red rivers for the sake of talisman and redemption, I open floodgates, I vituperate shadows, I unfurl flags along bastions, I run-run up tabulations of accounts and I redress grievances, I thwart damnations, I blow lungs open into the spray of froth before the onslaught of sharks, I redraft requests so the meaning of jackstraws reads clearlighted across

chasms like a strand of rope bridge, I fry duck eggs over camp-fires, I redistribute goods and services like untangling an entanglement of a convection current of mean-eyed snakes, I let blood by blood until of itself blood becomes an open frontier zone with clearcut sharp-eared waves of red shakti sway trance, I dismember fear with a knife so sectile as to be invisible to naked eyes, I cook dinners in camp-kitchens for golden hordes of spit-spit persons who appear unto me as mirage of gypsy caravan, stop, look, see me here among my cauldrons: I steep courage out of cabbage heads, and if I don't like what I cook, then I don't call it cooking!"



Witch Eye
Francesca Forté

Betsy Warland

cutting re/marks

marker. markher. mark my word. you toe the mark if you want good marks. if you want to make your mark — don't be an easy mark. marked for life. marker — markher! X marks the spot. cut it out! chromosome contempt.

castrate, kes-, to cut. the cutting open of my body for the second time in less than a year. the decision, which i had to make overnight in the hospital: hysterectomy or a "clean up." like — clean up your room. dirt. mess. carelessness. this one about the removal of my ovarian cysts, uterine fibroids, and endometrian tissue. my gynecologist tries to present me with choices. she's aware of my resistances. i'm aware of her preference. there's only one reasonable choice as far as she's concerned. but, she tries: hysterectomy; clean up; or go home and do nothing. nothing is not a choice: we agree on this. i could not accept a hysterectomy. would not allow, as H.D. writes, my "other center of consciousness" to be lobotomized. *hysterectomy, hysteria, udero-. uterus, venter, ventriloquism.* the art of *throwing one's voice, or speaking from the belly*, so that our words appear to be vocalized by a *mechanical dummy*. dummy — *a practical substitute*. why are there two of me and why this discrepancy? my womb: the "other center of consciousness" or "dummy"? my ovaries are being eaten up by a dis-ease my mother passed on. she writes "so sorry the genes of your mom cause you to have all these same problems." after the "clean up" all i have left are one-quarter of my right ovary and two-thirds of my left.

*incision, to strike, cut/
type, to blow, poke, beat/
write, to tear, scratch/*

: my body receiving its text

Due to the editor's suggestions, this version of "cutting re/marks" is slightly different from the version which appears in *Proper Deafinitions*, a collection of essays, prose poems, articles and prose pieces by Betsy Warland published by Press Gang Publishers in the spring of 1990.

the implicit violence of the written word
things die, are altered/
issuing forth
from every letter we inscribe
an inaudible little cry ...

my body struggling with its text. my first book. my mother determined to cut out the first suite of poems. words too graphic too honest about the breakdown of my marriage. she wanted to obliterate them. cut them out before she would let anyone see a copy. my brother arguing with her that people would notice a gap of twenty pages: they would suspect much worse things and how would she explain it. until then she had believed she could cut them out and no one would know. no one would even notice.

"cut it out, Betsy!" only at 37 i begin to say "no."

Cixous urges women to "inscribe" ourselves. mark of the spirit. painted bodies. marked, ritual objects. sacred openings. threshold to altered states. *taboo, exceedingly marked, marked as sacred*. permanent marks on my body. between my breasts. down to my navel. across the top of my mound. my body accepting its text.

crayon held tight in small hand "don't mark on yourself!"

the boundary of my skin has been cut open. *mark, mearc, boundary*. it has known long moments of meaninglessness. eventually, the skin reunites like lips. scarred mouths which need to speak out *my tissue, teks-, text*. i am making these marks. i am marking my words. leaving my marks. my body has forced my *surgery, ghesor-, hand*.

ten months ago, following my gallbladder surgery i wrote: "each day, when Daphne cleans my incision, i cry. cry when she cleans the end of the incision — by my navel. it doesn't hurt — it's just that it makes me feel so vulnerable. does this cut recall the original cut; my mother cut away from me? when she dabs the disinfectant on my wound it trickles down my side and a horrible sense of repulsion shudders through me — is it my tissue remembering my blood trickling during surgery? i don't know. those hours in surgery and the recovery room minutely recorded in my tissue but blank in my conscious mind. these sensations lie like landmines buried within my own body."

I didn't want this strange woman to sit so close to us. we had intentionally sought out the vacant corner of the waiting room so that we could touch each other discreetly — hold hands as i waited

to be "checked in." *check, ksei-, to rule, Sanskrit, he rules, Old Persian, kingdom, king, shah.* so alien — this kingdom. we huddle in the corner with her sitting two chairs away at a right angle. we hesitate — should we let go of each other? there are numerous chairs here, she can move if we offend her: it's her choice to be here. Daphne holds on too, so she must have come to a similar conclusion. this woman seems so grey and tight with nervousness and she's so densely clothed. they call her next: "Balantyne." we relax a bit more as she walks heavily away. when she's asked to put down next of kin, she replies "no one." to come into this kingdom without an officially recognized advocate seems masochistic to me. we decide that i'll put Daphne down as my sister. "Warland." it's begun. "married ... children ... religion ... employer ... i'm shocked to realize how my life cannot be registered in any of these: how utterly outside the formulae i am. within a handful of these questions my life is rendered invisible. my "no" and "none" and stumbling hesitations puzzle my uniformed questioner.

in the elevator. we are being escorted by a bleached-blond, square woman. our escort says "you're going to the same wing." clipped wings; wounded wings. the lone, gray woman stands small and heavy-coated in the corner. says to me "i hope they're not going to do to you what they're going to do to me." her horror falls over me like a net. metal hospital green begins to slowly lift us up like pallbearers lifting a coffin. once you've been strapped in and wheeled flat on your back down these halls and into this cold-sided box — your eyes fixed on its low ceiling — you know how like a coffin it is. maybe that's why people are so uncomfortable in elevators, stare at the floor the ceiling the numbers methodically flashing, anything, it's not simply an uneasiness created by being in a confined space. with the closing of that door we hear the sound of the last lid coming down.

during the first night we share the same ward. inmates. our beds place us once again in a diagonal position. we don't speak. both enclosed by our beige curtains — the nurse respecting hers is irritated by mine. both while Daphne is there and after she's gone, the nurse continually pulls back my cloth wall despite the fact i've told her i want it closed. she interprets my need as stubbornness: an unwillingness to submit to her authority.

i hear the grey woman talking quietly with her resident doctor. they are discussing her surgery and i hear the word "hysterec-tomy." she seems so alone with her fear. it throbs wordless from

her veiled corner. i read Maria Sabina's chants and am calmed. sleep well through the night with my earplugs. enemas and no water or food past midnight. i have begun my rites. next morning they come for me early. Daphne has managed to get me a private room, so i know i won't be coming back here after my laparoscopy. i've been debating as to how i can let my sister-ward partner know i'm thinking of her. finally, through the curtains i say "good luck, Balantyne." silence. she's probably surprised i know her name ... or maybe I've transgressed her privacy ... then her voice comes back — "thank you."

the next afternoon we walk slowly down the hall to the ward. i've asked the nurses about her and they've all replied that she came through the surgery "fine." i need to get a sense of it myself. the pall of curtains is drawn around her. all that is visible is the *catheter, ye-, to throw, abject, deject, ejaculate, inject, object, reject, subject*, hanging from the foot of her bed filled with blood and urine. we stand wordless in the hall and watch this silent weeping.

have it out / think it out / figure it out / carry it out / keep it out / check it out / cross it out / stake it out / act it out / pass it out / mark it out / hear it out / get it out / block it out / drive it out / cry it out / send it out / mail it out / hang it out / tough it out / tear it out / wait it out / work it out / write it out / put it out / strike it out / stand it out / spell it out / fight it out / yell it out / rule it out / ride it out / reason it out / point it out / push it out / pick it out / hold it out / leave it out / move it out / throw it out / lock it out / lend it out / give it out / live it out / seek it out / cut it out

once we acknowledge it exists

it needs out

which out is up to us

hysteric, Greek hystera, womb. all women by nature are hysterical — so the Greeks concluded and that is that. etymology is perhaps one of our few true records of the evolution of our beliefs, assumptions, and struggles for power. this history-in-a-word slowly accumulating, "proving" The Fathers' right to dominate; enforce their values. contemporary, correct usage obliterating or condemning those who are not men not white not monied not heterosexual. Hillman writes "We pass judgement upon people and their souls through this language, group them, and treat them as if they were these

things created by our words ... remember Freud, attempting to convince his compeers that hysteria existed in men. But hysteria could not exist in me, one scoffed, because hysteria means 'uterus'." it means what it means.
you can't fool around with language.

KEEP OUT

"... only the immature, underdeveloped nervous systems such as found in women, tend toward hysterical reactions."

"Less than one hundred years ago, around the time Freud studied with Charcot in Paris, Richer's treatment of hysteria ... was focused on the ovaries. Mechanical devices were invented for compressing them or for packing them in ice."

cool it baby
put it on ice

"Hysterectomy is a major surgical procedure requiring the use of general anesthetic and can have serious complications, including death."

"In Germany, Hagar (1830-1914) and Freidrich (1825-1882) were using more radical methods, including ovaectomy and cauterization of the clitoris. The source of hysteria was still, as in Plato's time, sought in the matrix of the female body, upon which surgical attacks were unleashed."

hysterectomy
his-tear-ectomy
his-to-tear-out-of-me

"... more than half the women in the United States have their wombs removed. Imagine that! Every other woman over forty you pass in the street in the United States has no uterus ... It's America's favourite operation."

not to mention breasts
so what we likely have
is over half the population of
women in North America
walking around with no womb and
one or no breasts
we consider this to be normal
in the life of woman

we believe ourselves lucky
to be living in
an era of advanced medicine

cool it
OR (Operating Room)
cut it out
our other center of consciousness
(*hysteris, uterus, ventriloquism*)

i was urged to have a hysterectomy to "control" my endometriosis

HYSTERECTOMY = LOBOTOMY

oh me
oh my
i'm a fool for you baby

i had gallbladder surgery in March 1983. I had gynecological surgery (laparotomy) in January 1984. the same two major surgeries my mother had, though she is a meat eater and i'm a vegetarian, she a heterosexual and I'm a lesbian, she a mother and I'm not, she living in the country and i'm in the city — my body is still held fiercely. genetic patterns / *tissue, teks-, text* insists on its uninscribed story. the small jar of odd marbles which i discovered in my grandmother's buffet drawer: my child's astonishment when i was told what they were. this story three generations old, perhaps it spans over more — i do not know my great-grandmother's text or her mother's or hers ...

we think in images we remember in images images repeat reassert themselves on us again ... again ...

the lab technician handed me the opalescent container. "Warland, Betsy" was written on it. when i saw the black stone through its milky walls, i felt unnerved. it looked like it was from another planet. egg shaped (2cm x 1 and a half cm), charred black with a greyish-white cap on either end flecked with gold that sparkles when held in the sun. i had this overwhelming urge to throw it in the sea. fear of the unknown. mother's darkness back to mother darkness. i had never seen another gallstone like this. i had never seen anything like this. when i visited my parents that summer, i asked my mom if she still had her stones. she returned with an opalescent container. one charred-black, egg shaped stone rested on its bottom. twenty-five years ago. twenty-five years later. the image repeats itself until we tell its story until we let it out

two black planets thousands of miles apart yet held within the same orbit

can you see in the dark?

hide-and-seek

"you'll never find me!"

endometriosis "end, inside + metrial, uterus." the image: inside the uterus —

"... with endometriosis, it's a case of the right thing in the wrong place ... the endometrial tissue is found growing outside the uterus. It may, for instance, be found on the ovaries or on the peritoneum ... even though the endometrial tissue has wound up in some abnormal location, it continues to thicken, break down and shed each month, which ... can cause pain and other problems ... These areas ... may menstruate at first, but as the disease progresses, so much scar tissue is formed that the endometrial tissue is compressed and can no longer menstruate. Thus, there will often be puckered, clawlike areas of endometrial tissue that are no longer active."

"the tissue has wound up in some abnormal location"

abnormal, ab-, away + norma, rule

i thought i would never feel it; believed i would never want it; knew i would never experience it. it never occurred to me that it would happen with a woman. i waited to miss my period. believed in parthenogenesis. "... with endometriosis, it's a case of the right thing in the wrong place." my tissue refusing to "shed." but no second body formed. i only bled inside. bled in hiding. my scarred text. developing "clawlike areas." i read this description of endometriosis only today. the image repeats itself. the body says "write this."

my father and i rushing my mother to hospital. cold-snow, dark winter night. her pain in the back seat. the bucket on the car floor. running out of gas two miles from town (her car — her always pushing people, things to their limit). my dad unable to get anyone to stop. i go out in the bitter-white wind. a young man stops almost immediately (this is what it takes: this wasn't what he expected). her lying in the emergency room. the pain excruciating. she asks for me. she thinks she's dying. we talk. emergency surgery. a burst endometrial ovarian cyst ... "chocolate cysts, endometriosis-type, with a very large cyst (5 x 4cm) on the right ovary and a smaller cyst on the left, with scarring of the adjacent tissue." nineteen years later my report reads "The ovaries were both cystic with prune

colored cysts, the right ovary being approximately 2 and a quarter times the normal size ... the ovarian size was about 4 to 5 cm." she was 56. i am 37. she lost both ovaries. i have portions of both left. i went into surgery prepared, but it was close. when they began to work on my right ovary, the cyst burst.

now i am on the birth control pill to "control" my endometriosis. i am a lesbian. i want a baby from my lover. i almost lost my uterus. i almost lost my *ovaries, awi-, bird*. my mother and me, nineteen years between our surgeries in different countries yet both on the fourth floors. the "gynie" floor — as my nurses say: the diminutives for woman insidious. the *gynecological, gune, woman + -logy* wing. the clipping of ...

i am on the birth control pill to control my ... control, control. i will find another way.

we think in images. we remember in images. repressed images reassert themselves upon us again and again without our recognition — until we cease to leave them out; cut them out. until we tell the story.

the body says "write this"

we've never met. we're talking on the phone. this stranger's voice says to me "i hate the thought of them cutting me up — invading me like that." not cut but invade. *rape, rep-, to seize; rapid, surreptitious*. she is feeling what i felt too; what i've heard so many other women speak of. being entered against our wills, even though we yield. "she must have asked for it."

surreptitious, sub, under, secretly + rapere, to seize anesthetic, an-, without + aisthetos, perceptible

do men feel this way? i hardly know of any men who have had major surgery. my parents seem the classic stereotypes: my mother having gallbladder surgery and a hysterectomy; my father having a heart attack and then a stroke. are there comparative statistics on this? i know women have surgery much more frequently. the forced entry. the flowing of blood. surgery. the breaking in of a virgin. the violent rape. all routine. all very familiar. the way things are.

sitting with my mother over lunch, my father in hospital with a stroke. she telling me all the major and minor surgeries she's had. a long list unravelling over the years, over the dreary food. the dramas of her body. i saw then how she has always believed something is wrong with her: wrong from the beginning. her unexplained black-

outs as a child. she has been trying to *diagnose, dia-, apart + gignoskein*, to perceive what is wrong with her her whole life.

who is *perceiving* and who is *apart*? the disassociating of ourselves from our own dis-eases. all the cutting into and cutting out makes no difference. all these sacrificial organ deaths yet no peace comes. there is no such thing as "routine surgery." a part cut out is apart from your body forever. the dead ovary. the dead gallbladder like phantom limbs insist on living again; will not accept unmarked graves. i inscribe them here. they have gone before me and lived my death. they reincarnate on this page.

the stone in me was like myself: a solitary planet. it looks like a planet. i know this stone is the sadness i buried deep ever since i was old enough to know how to do so. the sadness of alienation (*abnorm*); my spirit always too large; my desires always too intense — disquieting for those i was intimate with. Daphne is the first lover who meets me equally. no happenstance that the stone insisted on leaving: breaking its orbit. that sensation of inadvertently finding evidence of my childknowing: the "odd marbles" in my grandmother's drawer as she lay in her paralyzed sleep in the next room. my astonishment when i was told what they were. the yellow and brown swirl-colored marbles. a small jar full of them. enough to fill my 7 or 8 year-old hand. they felt like the sum of words never said. the hardened secrets of her private *melancholy, gall, yellow, gold, gleam, glitter, bright, glad, glow*. the sparkling flecks on the ends of my stone. the stone cinder-black. the flecks. light forced to turn back in on itself?

hospital, ghost-ti-, guest, host, hostile: always on my guard against my host's hostility. only a facial expression away. i am courteous but i keep to myself as much as possible. stripped of almost everything — i am too vulnerable to other people's energies. i am getting ready to "go under" (Persephone and the pomegranate seed); be cut open. all my concentration is required to prepare myself. i need to be ready for anything; at least the possibility of. for anything is possible. that strange saying "if something happens to me ..." something is always happening to us: this isn't something. this is something else.

the night before my surgery both Daphne and i feel peaceful. the "prep lady" (far from being preppy) comes in to shave my mound. she shaved around my belly button two days ago before my

laparoscopy. there was no time left. "visiting hours are over" had been announced several minutes ago and now the flat-toned nun was smoothing out the grey blanket of her evening prayer over the entire hospital. we had to kiss and hold each other quickly before a nurse turned the handle. we had to refind our own peace over the next hours. before we could each fall asleep. in our separate beds. in our separate souls.

the next morning i stood. waited at the guests' lounge window. watched as far as the Burrard Street bridge for Daphne's faded red toyota. colored metal streaming intently through concrete arteries. i needed to see her out there. moving midst it and toward me. i stood at that fourth floor window and when i saw that red, i vowed not to do this again. i would find another way.

i've stayed away from this "piece" for a few days. stayed away from these feelings; needed a "break" but my sleep-self has called me back. insisted i re-turn. roll over in the night/sharp pain in my *diaphragm*, *dia-*, *completely* + *phrassein*, *to enclose*. day-self suddenly face to face with night-self, forcing me to acknowledge the dream i just had. sitting up. trying to breathe. ease the pain. Daphne's awake now. rubbing my back. i tell her the dream: "i was dreaming about 'the line' — the long prose-poetry line. my lines — the ones i've been writing lately. all the lines were forming into bars around me/enclosing me/constructing a cage. i felt so panicky: i didn't have much time — i had to find a way out or i'd be caught behind these bars. trapped for ..." writing is a constructing of the cage of our own particular/peculiar reality. as i write line-bars gradually build their way down the open page. the dreaded Pan in the woods. the woods at night the tree-trunk dark cage. *trunk*, *ter-*, *pass through*, *overcome*: that moment when we knock the tower of blocks over, when things we've constructed threaten to clone us. self-survival? non destructiveness? we must find our way out. *overcome* our own *trees*, *deru*, *truths*. see the trees for the forest. the line must never stop rewrighting itself, as trees recede and re-seed.

Hillman: "By conceiving symptoms as sacrifice, they take on new meanings and receive soul." the symptom not "apart" or a "part" or a "piece": *symptom*, *sun-*, *together* + *peptein*, *to fall*. all the pieces falling into place. "Quantum theory thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units." and if we are unaware that this is not "routine surgery" but sacrifice — what happens then?

limb. the losing of a limb; not only an arm or leg (is that what it cost you?) but any part of us; any branch any root. limb/limbo.

bitter, to split, bite, bait, fission.

sitting in the waiting room. i recognize the woman sitting across from me; we have a mutual friend. after "hello" there's the inevitable "how have you been?" her face becomes in/tense as i tell her that i've recently had surgery. she asks me several questions about it. no deflective "oh" and quickly moving on to another topic. so i ask her if she's ever had surgery. her face gives me the answer before her words: "Yes, several years ago ... I'll always be bitter about it."

now, when writing this frightens me; when i think perhaps i should be writing "something" else; that maybe i'm simply being self-indulgent — i think of her limbo. i think of the great knot in her face.

being wheeled down to OR. life or ... entering the state of *or, Middle English, contraction of other*. going to the place Of Other. Daphne walking alongside, holding the chrome side of the Patient Lift (my mother's saying "it gave me such a lift"). lift before the fall.

at the double doors we say goodbye. i look in her eyes: "siempre." tears. blur of swinging doors and i'm wheeled into the Holding Room. this is as alone as it gets. on the brink of ... the holding of your dear-one's hand — denied. yet, i choose to think of this name as comforting — Holding Room — and feel myself gathered up by a greater, disembodied tenderness. the nurse comes up and asks my name and if i know what type of surgery i am having. she gives me a paper cap for my head, which has a bizarre similarity to a party hat, and asks me if i'm warm enough. she leaves, placing a large clipboard on top of my legs: my storyboard. there are three others lined up parallel to me in the dimly lit room: i pray for each one. i've intentionally not accepted sleeping pills or tranquilizers and seem to be more alert than the others. i wanted the calming to come from within my own body and soul, and it has. we are all going in for different types of surgery (i hear the nurse speaking to each of them). i wonder how Daphne is doing: send her my love. then remember a friend of mine telling of how she was lined up with seven other women, out in a hallway, who were all scheduled for mastectomies. i rehear her indignity at the sense of a conveyor belt lopping off their breasts: "It was like a goddamned parking lot!"

in my mind i talk gently to my ovaries and uterus. with my hand on my abdomen, i prepare my body for the invasion, assuring it, urging it to not resist, struggle against, but rather flow with the presence of these others soon to enter me.

soon my skin will be rendered meaningless.

limbo, in, on + limbu, border.

soon i am going to the place of Other; my consciousness will be taken from me; my memory intercepted. only my tissue will voice where we have been: pain its only syllable. memory a cry or moan.

"Betsy Warland?"

"yes."

"I've come to take you to OR."

"OK."

down the cool hall i think of Daphne. wonder if it isn't harder to wait.

"We're going to room 9."

zenith number: death; enlightenment; fruition ...

it surprised me the first time — how empty these rooms are. how narrow and cold the surface of the operating table is. two nurses are in the corner counting out loud and in unison the sponges and instruments (two and two makes four; four and four makes eight ... it never stops) the anesthesiologist comes up, introduces himself and i check with him about the type of anesthesia i've requested. the resident doctor i spoke with yesterday comes up and says "hi." the anesthesiologist asks one of the nurses to call on the intercom to see if Dr. Simmons is ready for surgery: "Yes, she's on her way." the one nurse attaching the monitor disks on my torso chats about how expensive they've become. except for the huge disk light above me (which is not yet on) and the sound of the nurses counting, i can see no instruments or equipment: no evidence of what's about to happen. only people. later, after my neck had been sore for two days, i found out that a tube had been stuck down my throat. much later, i saw a series of photographs in a book which recorded each stage of the elaborate "draping" the patient before surgery. *drape, der-, to split, peel, flay, derma, epidermis, trap.* the clock on the wall is at three minutes to noon. the anesthesiologist says "Betsy, I'm going to give you your first injection now. It will come through the intravenous and you will feel your eyes

rolling back for a few moments. Are you ready?" "Yes." it hits quickly. my eyes have a horrible fluttering sensation, futile fluttering against glass my whole body in a slow motion backflip deep-pit-fall ... the next thing i know my eyes are opening to a clock on the Recovery Room wall. it's three fifteen.

i immediately scan my body to assess how i am: can tell i've come through surgery all right. a nurse at my side now asks me if i know my name. to her, this question is recovery procedure, to me it is a sign of how radical these past three hours have been. how they've altered me to the core yet all i can say is my name. and i'm grateful i can: it's perhaps the last thread that holds us here. the nurse is now taking my pulse; blood pressure; asking me if i feel ok. my body is shuddering inside. she brings me a warm blanket which feels reassuring. i become aware of the other patients in the room. the drugs are dulling my pain sufficiently and this particular pain is more familiar this time. i remember being so relieved after i woke up from my gallbladder surgery: the pain was not nearly as excruciating as the attacks had been — which no pain killers could relieve. why "killers?" when confronted with something they don't like; feel fearful of — violence seems to always be The Fathers' first instinct and institutionalized response.

as i lie here now, i become more aware that "something" has moved through me; "something" that had total authority over me which altered my body, my spirit ... everything feels shifted inside. everything seems to be trembling with shock. i lie very still and say a prayer; know i have been held within the circle of light. the anesthetic is the heaviest i've had. it has taken me near enough to the threshold of death, near enough that my soul had begun to protectively move a step before me. like incest — the emotions are all here but the memories are repressed. it is now 4 o'clock.

"Betsy, we're going to send you back to your room now."

i smile with the thought of seeing Daphne and quietly holding her hand. that connection — my arm, hand to her hand, arm: the umbilical cord birthing me back into this life. she's standing outside my room door when i arrive. smiles. "hi love."

i've seen her face 2 times now just back from surgery, returned to consciousness, & each time it has seemed so intensely pure to me, spiritual, as if her flesh has somehow lost its materiality — her spirit there so gravely — a grave stillness in her face then as if cleansed of

everything but pure being — conscious of just being — not of wanting anything, or striving for something, just there and only there — fragile, yes, vulnerable because so self-revealed, but enduring, not strong in the way we usually think of strength (assertive) but in presence of simply continuing even within fragility — feeling very close to her own fate (don't know what other word to use — but it is that sense of shape not her usual identity (personality) but very much hers — where death defines her) & she looks then so completely & purely herself — it is as if i see her again for the first time, fall in love again for the first time, seeing her so clear of everything but her death, toward which she is moving & which also allows her to be who she is.

twice i have had surgery. twice i have had my memories of this profound experience “seized.” though i heard every word, every sound, though my tissue felt every violation — those hours of broken boundaries within that clean room on that cold-narrow table are a blank space in my conscious mind. an empty screen on my black monitor. not even an A prompt.

only a *com(m)a*, *koptein*, to cut
(what they don't know won't hurt them")
this is the cut that hurts most
this is where the damage is done



and this is where the damage is held
condensed on this page
like a tear in limbo

repressed images reassert themselves upon us over and over again until we recognize them; until we cease to leave them out; cut them out.

until we wake up from the *com(m)a*

the woman who went from doctor to doctor, trying to find a diagnosis for the gnawing pain in her thigh. no relief. no accurate explanation. the pain relentless. finally, in desperation (“it's all in you head”) she tried hypnosis (stop smoking after one session?) and there it was. the memory. intact. an intern leaning against her as he observed a surgery which she had undergone. leaning against her. making disparaging remarks about her body. the

insult the injury absorbed into her tissue her cells at the point of contact: his arm on her thigh. her pain the words she was denied. after remembering — the pain vanished. she had needed to know her story; she had needed to speak her anger; she had needed to have herself back again. her body, in her own terms. *intact, in-, not + tactus, to touch.*

Louky Bersianik's belief that woman is a victim of amnesia — which is our genderization. our brainwashing so normalized that we are barely aware of it. often our only *tangible, tangibilis, to touch* sign is a gnawing, inexplicable *pain. kwei-, penalty, penal, pine, punish.* the penalty of our gender: the pain we catch a glimpse of in one another's eyes?

the body says write this

i told Daphne about the seagull two days later. i had decided not to tell her — didn't want to worry her. it seemed a private omen: one i was to hold quietly to myself at the time.

at four o'clock, on the day before my surgery, i was lying in bed. no one else was around. suddenly i heard a wailing cry. outside the window i saw a seagull alone on the northeast corner of the hospital roof. it was the most poignant cry: it wailed out four times into the southwest still-grey day. i felt convinced that someone had died and the gull was releasing their spirit skyward. an hour later i heard a baby had died in its birthing "at four o'clock this afternoon." it was the only death i heard of in the nine days i was there (death a taboo). the next morning a gull (that gull?) landed on my window ledge. Daphne and i were astonished as this hadn't happened before. it was so close. looked intent and straight at us as we said "hi!" we were struck by its beauty but i watched in silence. it was here for me, there was no doubt in my mind. though this frightened me, i felt more moved by its purity. it was a magnificent gull with intense, sweet-bronze eyes and sun-white breast. i knew it was waiting for a response from me. i addressed it with my inner voice.

"why are you here?"

"i've come to see if you're ready."

"no, i'm not ... i have work to do; work which i've committed my spirit to. you are beautiful, i would be honored to have my spirit released by you, but it's not my time. go away in peace." and it flew away immediately.

for several days after surgery that horrible broken feeling every time you sit, stand, or roll over — your insides avalanching. the fear at first that if you move the wrong way or too much or too fast everything will come undone. the unbrokens' illusion of their bodies' indivisibility. their bodies as shields invulnerable against ... *shields, to cut, scalpel.* "let's play Doctor." sugar daddies/surgery daddies. the knife has two edges.

the boundary of my skin has been broken. cut open. it has known long moments of meaninglessness. body parts of hundreds of thousands of us are collected each day and burned to what god? the skin reunites like two lips. tight lipped: "my lips are sealed." out of these these scar-mouths our stories can be told — but this time, we must open them ourselves.

LAPAROTOMY

(Tubal ligation, removal of ovary, tuboplasty, ectopic pregnancy, removal of ovarian cyst)

Activities

- no heavy housework for 4-6 weeks
- gradually resume mild exercise, e.g. daily walk. Avoid strenuous exercise for 4 weeks, may swim after 2 weeks
- will require rest period during day
- no intercourse according to the doctor
- may use seat belt

these hospital instructions have been handed out to thousands and thousands of women since 8/78 (the date on the sheet). through all these years they haven't even bothered to notice or change the misspelling of ovary. "overy" — oh very nice of you to come, oh very funny. ask the doctor.

"no intercourse according to the doctor." the gospel according to ... yes, some women do feel better; freed from all that pain; freed from all that anxiety ("something" growing in there — cancer?). we're told we'll feel much better. just as we're told a hysterectomy doesn't affect our sex life. some women, in fact, enjoy sex more afterwards. but many more women find that their sensual and sexual sensations have been altered; diminished. sometimes dramatically so. they don't tell us this.

what they don't know won't hurt them

"Men with the highest medical qualifications pontificated that the very concept of female orgasm was a fantasy of depraved minds, and beyond belief. Havelock Ellis quotes Acton, a leading English authority of the day, who condemned the suggestion that women have sexual feelings as 'a vile aspersion'."

i grew up with this:

"what's wrong with Mrs. So & So; is she sick?"

"oh, she just has women's complaints."

complaint, plak-, to strike. a man recently in the paper said he never hit his girlfriend "hard enough to leave marks."

the mastery of making our pain insignificant: invisible.

no bruises = no abuse

how we still slink away in shame and silence (Balantyne). how we wear a fake breast to conceal our loss — what would happen if every woman were to refuse this camouflage: walk out of her home tomorrow, fling it in the air and go to work; to the post office; to the grocery store; to her exercise class; to a meeting ... what would happen if the marks were made visible to other women; to men; to children? what would happen if men were brought face to face with their institutionalized medical practices of defeminization? what would happen if all these millions of women could suddenly recognize each other — see the volume and strength of the altered species to which they belong? what would happen? everything would happen. and medicine would be forced to dis-cover other "cures" other "givens" other values.

and if we continue to accept "it" being cut out/ covered up? nothing will happen, except what continues to happen in the general routine of mutilating and mutating our bodies.

"The diagnosis of hysteria went through many vicissitudes ... but 'hysteric' and 'witch' never lost their close association. For instance, in nineteenth-century French psychiatry, an old test for the witch — sticking her with pins and needles — was used in clinical demonstrations of hysteria."

"In his old age, and in a last, strictly psychoanalytic paper, Freud ... concludes that one reaches 'bedrock,' the place where analysis could be said to end, when the 'repudiation of femininity' in both men and women has been successfully met. In a woman the repudiation of femininity is manifested in her intractable penis

envy; in a man this repudiation will not allow him to submit and be passive to other men."

"... we have no evidence of Freud's ever having analyzed a little girl." so it seems, that "Freud's fantasy of the little girl's mind becomes a Freudian fantasy in the little girl's mind."

my mother writes, while under the hair dryer at the beauty salon:

"I'm sorry that you have some of my experiences of my younger years. I worked like crazy & on projects (really not considering what my body could take & really abusing it). Then when all went very well with what I was accomplishing & the months of work were accomplished — I found it hard to lessen The Pace & when trying to relax, I found I couldn't & health problems & mental problems came. This showed me I must live a more regular & strenuous life." here she rereads what she's written and inserts "not such a" before "strenuous life." my mother, still struggling with her hysteria. trying to convince me (convince herself) that a "regular" life is what she really wanted/wants. then, she writes, "your life will be more secure & gratifying." she says I should find "something that will enhance" my life. something ...

it was the only time I can remember her being happy, glowing. when she was intensely involved with other women working on church committees, community projects, conferences, radio programs ... travelling here and there in cars full of women with purpose. women who had a bit of time to experience their own, independent identity. their own possibilities. their own potential.

but the pressures grew. things mounted up at home. she was gone more and more and things got more and more behind and my brother and i did more and more of the work. it wasn't a workable life for a woman of her time and place. it wasn't a life she could sustain. she could only justify her absence as a wife, a mother, and a daughter (to her ailing parents a mile away) for so long and ... she had to return to living "a more regular life." return to her loneliness and frustration therein.

regular, regularis, containing rules, from regula, ruler. as soon as she wrote "regular" she broke out of it away from it to "strenuous."

strenuous, strenuus, brisk, nimble, vigorously active, energetic, zealous.

my mother's hand moving across the page the first time tells her truth: lets it out. on the second time — covers it back up. *correct, com-, with*

+ *regere, straight, rule*. her body said "write this." and her guilt corrected it.

"The hysterical reactions may be seen as desperate attempts to rebind body, to incarnate, to find initiation into life."

HYSTERO-RULE

the best science has to offer

the female ovum did not exist until 1827. science did not confirm the necessity of the egg's conjunction with the sperm until 1875. conception, until that date, was attributed solely to the sperm.

"It is important to realized how very late in history our scientific understanding of female functioning is."

ovary, awi-, bird, egg

"Before the wind-borne bird became an attribute of goddesses ... the Great Mother was represented as all-bird. She bore the egg of creation in her buttocks, which gave her an odd 'steatopygous' look. Her face is beaked and neck elongated birdwise ... Many cultures trace their origins to an egg cosmogony at the beginning of time."

in the Tao, the ovaries & uterus are known as the Ovarian Palace, which is the source of Chi and wisdom.

this is not a piece of my mind

this is not a piece

and this is no *dummy (udero-, ventriloquism)* speaking

i acknowledge my sacrifice

and i embrace my source of power

these are my marks

and this is the writing body

H.D., *Thought and Vision*, City Lights Books, 1982.

James Hillman, *Inter Views*, Harper & Row, 1983.

James Hillman, *The Myth of Analysis*, Harper Torchbooks, 1978.

Lynda Madaras and Jane Patterson, *Womancare*, Avon, 1981.

Small Girl at the Chesapeake (for lisa)

The house looms large behind her, old rooms full of old ghosts. The girl wanders circular down to the summer salt of the bay, stands at the edge, afraid. She wants to immerse herself, feel the blueness buoy her up. She enters, the waves tossing her lightly, toying with her, pulling and tugging. She feels the edge of fear, but it subsides; it is just the outside edge, not all the way in. Her head turns to the lonely squeal of the dolphins coming in and she knows she will touch them even before she sees their eyes.

They approach and circle her, unafraid, she treading lightly in the blackening water, the sun dipping low behind the house, her grandmother calling darling, darling come in and she is, but not to the house, to the center of the dolphins who are circling, nudging, calling one another and her. She pulls back

then reaches her small hand toward the fin. It is soft, fleshy, slick as wet leather. She grabs hold firmly as the dolphin turns, flips the dorsal fin and slithers through the dark water. She rests her body gently against the back, shapes her stomach to the arch, imagines this one tossing her young in the glistening waves. The dolphin coos and turns, the pacing quick as it pulls her out toward the open water and her body is still leaning close, her cheek pressed tight against the pulsing airhole, her legs resisting the rush of water. At the last moment she releases, unwraps her hand from the fin, her numb fingers spreading open in the black water, her feet kicking slowly guiding her back to the shore, to her grandmother's voice stronger now, circling her with the thick towel, pulling her close, laying her down in the soft bed upstairs.

Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras — Critical and Creative Perspectives by Women of Color, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa (1990, 402 pp., \$14.95, Aunt Lute Foundation Books, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141)

Outshout a Waterfall

Art is a struggle between the personal voice and language, with its apparatus of culture and ideologies, and art mediums with their genre laws — the human voice trying to outshout a waterfall.

Gloria Anzaldúa

Closing the final page, *el punto final*, of *Haciendo Caras* I got up from my desk and stepped into a hot shower. The water pouring over my body released a multitude of emotions and I sat down in the streaming water and cried. Who am I? How can I testify to the elegant and vivid truth of this monumentally important book? I am not formally educated enough to be a literary critic, not dark enough to be a visible minority, not white enough for the luxury of emotional distance. How could my white mother know the cruelty of excising my ethnic heritage? How could my Filipino father know the tragic consequences of abandoning me to this no-where, in-between place? In the steaming lap of the bathtub my fate overcomes me. A fate to which I thought I had been *abandonado* until now. Now I remember myself. I am of *la raza cósmica, la cultura mestiza*.

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode — nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.

Gloria Anzaldúa, from "La conciencia de la mestiza:
Towards a New Consciousness"

It is from the point of view of the *mestiza* that I approach the contents of this diverse and illuminating collection of poems, stories and essays by women of color.

Haciendo Caras is a challenge to white women as well as women of color to listen, and listen carefully and deeply, to what has been lovingly framed and articulated within this book.

I wanted a book that would teach ourselves and whites to read in non-narrative traditions.

A book that would deepen the dialogue between all women and that would take on various issues — hindrances and possibilities — in alliance building.

from the Introduction by Gloria Anzaldúa

For this kind of reading we need time and courage, the kind of courage exemplified by the writers gathered in the book. The courage to speak about ordinary, difficult and painful issues. Issues of being a refugee, an alien, an immigrant, a prisoner, an "other," an "outsider" — "el barco que nunca atraca" (Lorna Dee Cervantes). Dangerous issues in a culture that tries to dominate and subsume everything different, helpless or not easily understood.

... what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know is. It is an affirmation that sensuality is intelligence, that sensual language is language that makes sense.

Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory"

It is apparent that a great deal of time and effort have gone into bringing this material together as a resource — as a source of inspiration and knowledge its value is immeasurable. It deserves to be read with the depth of feeling normally reserved for our closest friends.

We must commit ourselves to learning about each other so that we may accomplish our goals without paternalism, maternalism or guilt. This requires a willingness to explore histories, novels, biographies and other readings that will help us to grasp the realities of class, race and other dimensions of inequality.

Zinn, Cannon, Higgenbotham, Dill, "The Cost of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies"

Each of the pieces presented in this book reveals a creative way of looking at the world, a way of addressing catastrophic experience that we cannot afford to ignore or abandon. No matter what our reasons may be: inertia, frustration, ignorance or fear. Certainly, none of the women writing can tolerate the spiritual and psychological wreckage of silence.

We must face the Medusa, the unfaceable in ourselves, in order to have access to the powers we require. Mistakes must be forgiven. Everyday repeats an opportunity, for beginning anew.

Chela Sandoval, "Feminism and Racism"

Haciendo Caras seems to me to be a manifesto, a call to action, an agenda for dismantling walls of silence. Prohibitive habits of language do not serve the soul's need to rejoice and invent itself. Exclusive and artificial habits of social interaction eliminate spontaneity. "I want my identity to start with each moment." (Edna Escamill) But this ironic desire presents a dilemma. The reader must disentangle herself from preconceptions about race, class and gender while she can never forget her status as a *mestiza*. This means she must allow herself to be situated in a landscape where there are no familiar landmarks, where no thing can be predetermined, where her languages may fail her, where faces and voices often slip into mystery and contradiction. This is terrain the writers in *Haciendo Caras* know very well. It is a meeting ground, the "encrucijada" where love begins and honesty is essential. María Lugones in her essay "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling and Loving Perception" suggests a remarkably oracular vision of this crossroads:

The Playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an openness to surprise. This is a particularly metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly.

So, positively, the playful attitude involves openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the "worlds" we inhabit playfully.

Haciendo Caras is an opportunity to listen to the multidimensional voices which are the beauty and music of our "worlds." At the same time it leads us to understand the brutal consequences of exiling these rich voices to silence. As Chrystos writes, "... if I don't make manifest the beauty I carry in my heart, use my gifts — the regret and anger will poison me." *Esta es la Verdad*.

It means I am entering my soul in a struggle that will most certainly transform all the peoples of the earth: the movement into self-love, self-respect and self-determination is the movement now galvanizing the true majority of human beings everywhere.

June Jordan, "Where is the love?"

Haciendo Caras is a map, a record of places familiar, strange, celestial and geographical. It is a starting point and a steady compass reckoning. Read this book. Sit down with the brave women who have revealed their faces; women who have offered their voices so that together we can laugh, cry and touch each other.

In the Introduction, Gloria Anzaldúa writes,

Let the reader beware — I here and now issue a caveat perusor:
s/he must do the work of piecing this text together.

However, much of the work has already been done. This collection is a labor of love beautifully and strategically organized from beginning to end. We have only to open our hearts and read.

— Sharon (née De La Peña) Davenport

Love and Politics—Radical Feminist and Lesbian Theories by Carol Anne Douglas (1990, 363 pp., \$12, ism press, POB 12447, SF, CA 94112)

In her 1982 novel *To the Cleveland Station* Carol Anne Douglas wrote: "I am an ex-Catholic who looked for another faith and found it. That explains so much about me." Today she identifies as both a radical and lesbian feminist. As much as anything, her new book *Love and Politics, Radical and Lesbian Feminist Theories* is an attempt to explain to herself and others the tenets of Douglas' current faith.

As well as a personal synthesis, *Love and Politics* is a retrospective of the last 25 years of radical feminist and Lesbian feminist (primarily U.S.) theory. Carol Anne is in a good position to take on such an enormous task: for over 17 years she has written for *off our backs*, reviewing books, reporting on conferences and interviewing numerous feminist philosophers. Consequently she is able to show how both individual theorists and feminist theory itself have developed over time. She augments theory taken from books and speeches with interviews she conducted as well as personal conversations and correspondence. For instance, Carol Anne demonstrates how Adrienne Rich was influenced by Susan Cavin's theory of sex differences when Rich was Cavin's thesis advisor for *Lesbian Origins*. Such examples make *Love and Politics* engaging to read and show the cross-pollination of radical Lesbian and feminist theory. While tackling hefty theoretical subjects, the writing is often anecdotal. Particularly when discussing Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir, Carol Anne paraphrases and explains — something many readers will find helpful.

Carol Anne identifies the following as sources of contemporary radical feminist theory: mid-twentieth century African-American movements, existentialism (particularly de Beauvoir), anarchism and

Marxism. I agree these are all important, though I would place much less emphasis on de Beauvoir than Carol Anne does. But I am surprised to find no mention of the first wave of American and English feminism, the anti-slavery movements or the early homosexual rights movements in Germany and the US. More recently, neither the old nor new US left is credited as influencing radical feminist thought. ("Marxism" for Carol Anne consists of applications of the writings of Karl Marx and socialist-feminism.) In fact, the phrase "male chauvinism" comes from the American Communist Party. Both the emphasis on the political significance of interpersonal relations and the necessity of forming an autonomous women's liberation movement in the face of leftist male intransigence to wimmin's demands for justice stemmed directly from radical wimmin's experiences in the New Left. (See for instance *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* by Alice Echols.) And neither world-wide anti-imperialist national liberation struggles nor the history of resistance to tyranny radical feminists brought from our ethnic histories as Jews, Irish, Hawaiian and Chinese (of course there are many more, see, for instance "Red Roots of White Feminism" in *Sinister Wisdom 25* by Paula Gunn Allen) are credited. (I in no way disagree with Carol Anne's observation that African-American movements of the '50s, '60s and '70s were where many radical wimmin learned the theories of non-violence, armed resistance and separatism. I wish she'd included the importance of African-Americans as models of strong, powerful womonhood for young white wimmin active in the civil rights movements, which Sara Evans so eloquently documents in *Personal Politics*.) I was glad to see such ideas as leaderless collectives, alternative institutions and egalitarian personal relationships given their rightful source (anarchism).

In a section called "Theory Under Fire" Carol Anne raises criticisms of the "universalism" of early feminist writing: often wimmin who were white and middle-class wrote as though their experience were universal. Carol Anne consistently credits wimmin of color with creating theory much more rich and diverse than what came before. Unfortunately, she omits analyses by fat wimmin, disabled wimmin, mad (I use the term "mad" loosely to describe a heterogeneous group of wimmin critical of psychiatry and some or all of therapy — not all these wimmin in fact call themselves "mad") wimmin and old wimmin. These writings have been widely available for many years, including within the pages of *oob*. Certainly looksism was a target of early

feminist activism (*Love and Politics* contains a picture of a Miss America protest). Fat, old and disabled wimmin have challenged not only societal standards of attractiveness but also Lesbian feminist internalizing of these standards. As Vivian Mayer (Aldebaran) points out in *Shadow on a Tightrope*, fat wimmin's liberation stemmed from radical feminism. Disabled wimmin's writings have broadened feminist understanding of reproductive rights and female sexuality. Also they have challenged ableist language and led the push to create greater access within the wimmin's communities. Judging from the ableist and mentalist language (using words like "crazy" and "sane" with no analysis regarding their functions within patriarchy to keep radicals in line) in *Love and Politics* Carol Anne is either unaware of these challenges or dismissed them. Although she states that "any theory that proposes a psychological or individual solution to the problem of women's oppression is not radical feminist," this does not speak to the effects that "therapism" (this word comes from Jan Raymond) has within our communities. Nowhere does Carol Anne acknowledge the stultifying effect the fear of being locked up has upon both theory and practice for radical wimmin. In her "Notes for a Magazine" (*Sinister Wisdom* 36) Elana Dykewomon writes: "Next to the physical war against women ... there is the psychological war — the war against women's minds." How can we make revolution without claiming our minds and bodies? Again, quoting Dykewomon: "(A)lmost every woman I've ever met has a secret belief that she is just on the edge of madness, that there is some deep, crazy part within her, that she must be on guard constantly against 'losing control' — of her temper, of her appetite, of her sexuality, of her feelings ... of her mind."

Carol Anne identifies the origins of male domination as a primary question for feminists. She locates a major distinction between the "classic" radical feminists and what she describes as "focus on women" (or focus on Lesbians) theorists. The "classic" radical feminists' "politics (were) articulated in the late 1960s by such groups as New York Radical Women, the Feminists, Redstockings, and individuals such as Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett and Ti-Grace Atkinson.... The impetus for radical feminism developed among women who believed that women's and men's biological differences did not determine personality traits and should not be socially significant." The "focus on women" theorists (surely she could have found a better name) who emerged in the the early seventies believe there are greater biological differences between men and wimmin

than radical feminists acknowledge. (Some believe that men and wimmin are different species.) They hold that "women have developed a culture that is separate from male culture and more nurturing. Women can gain more from being with one another than with men." This group includes Mary Daly, Jill Johnston, Elizabeth Gould Davis and Susan Cavin. Carol Anne cites a variety of sources for both groups, again showing how individuals' ideas developed and influenced each other.

The section on "Love, Sex and Sexuality in Radical Feminist Politics" chronicles critiques of heterosexuality raised by Lesbians. She charts as well the development of the idea that Lesbianism in itself is political. I take issue with a number of her statements here:

Generally, only those who believe that lesbianism can be *chosen* see lesbianism as part of a political solution for women.... The belief that sexual orientation is genetically determined or instilled in infancy is more commonly held by gay men than lesbians... Lesbians who see their lesbianism as predetermined... identify as gay women.

I find this an appalling overgeneralization, quite irresponsibly given with no citations. You can "be" a Lesbian but live as a heterosexual due to various societal disincentives ranging from lack of information to death. Does any gay or Lesbian person believe China ever had "no homosexuals"? Creating a world in which Lesbianism is available as an option for all wimmin who experience themselves as Lesbians is a political goal; living as a visible Lesbian, expanding our ideas of how Lesbians look, act and create culture, are political tactics. This is true both for Lesbians who experience their Lesbianism as choice and as innate. Both gay and Lesbian activists have criticized focus on the etiology of "homosexuality" because it stems from a disease model, an attempt to find the cause so "science" can find a cure. Some radical Lesbians neither know nor care whether their Lesbianism is innate or chosen.

Carol Anne also discusses love itself, and what impairs Lesbian love from flourishing. Amazingly she mentions addiction not at all and abuse only in passing. I believe the awareness of how widespread child abuse and addiction are, and various strategies utilized by radical Lesbians to recover from them, are central issues in current feminist theory. Nor does she discuss the move toward individual recovery from abuse and addiction through 12-step programs and therapy and the accompanying move away from critiques of the

institutions which perpetuate abuse and addiction (in particular the family) and their place within patriarchy. I consider this an enormously important development of the '80s within the wimmin's movements and think it must be discussed as both part of feminist theory and a reason for the erosion of radicalism within the wimmin's movement.

The final section of the book is entitled "Goals, Strategies and Tactics: A Radical Feminist Weakness?" Here Carol Anne discusses separatism, coalition, violence and nonviolence. She discusses how we can get what we want. I found the discussion of separatism basically fair, providing a good overview of the variety of what separatists themselves define as separatism, a history of separatism with criticisms from non-separatists and responses from separatists. Although Carol Anne makes clear the work on race and class done by separatists, she undercounted by half the number of Lesbians of color who contributed to *For Lesbians Only* (a major separatist anthology edited by Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope), thereby contributing to the lie that separatism is for white wimmin only.

Carol Anne says "We're mostly some mixture of separatist and integrationist." This statement is characteristic of her own pluralism and the thrust of the book. She wants multiple strategies, multiple goals, multiple outcomes. I believe this is in part due to Carol Anne's being raised Catholic, coming from a tradition which considers itself appropriate for all people and has no compunctions about proselytizing the "one true faith." Certainly Carol Anne does not carry this to the extremes the Catholic church does. But a primary criterion for her evaluation of tactics is how successfully they can be used for recruiting new wimmin to the movement. And, in the section on universalism cited earlier Carol Anne says "(T)here are some women whom feminists must speak for, until they are in a situation where their voices can be heard. Only people with a greater share of liberty may be able to say what they need.... We must ... make even more speculative assumptions based on our own experience." This makes me nervous. If Carol Anne ignores the writing of US wimmin (mad, old, disabled and fat) chronicled in her own newspaper when writing about "love and politics," how can we assume she can theorize meaningfully about the needs of Lesbians in East Timor or sexist division of labor among the Tasaday? Carol Anne says, "All ... feminisms should be universal... all of them should address the situation of all women in some way." Does this mean Lesbian separatists must address the needs of straight married women? That socialist-

feminists must address the needs of successful self-professed "capitalist-feminists" who think all we need is to pass the ERA?

In fact I do find something catholic about feminism. I also believe my understanding of feminism deepens the more I read and hear different wimmin testify for themselves. Part of my job as a radical Lesbian feminist is to make room (in my heart and in the world) for their testimony and to explore with them whether or not we can make meaningful coalition.

Love and Politics is an ambitious undertaking. There is much more in the book than I can discuss here. Despite its shortcomings, it's an important document, particularly for wimmin new to feminism. *Love and Politics* will make an invaluable addition to many women's studies classes.

— Barbara Ruth



My Jewish Face and Other Stories by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz
(1990, 234 pp., \$9.95, Aunt Lute Foundation Books)

In "Dance on the Face of the Earth," Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz writes, "I didn't know yet about ebb and flow, that life is not a river but an ocean, fathomless, nothing if not contradictory, tugging you this way and that so you cry yes and no at the same moment."

This and other stories in *My Jewish Face and Other Stories* focus on the moments of yes and no, the courage it takes to recognize and act upon them and the profound shifts such choices make in the lives of Jewish women: feminists, activists, scholars, lesbians, comrades, sisters, lovers and friends.

In her first collection of fiction, Kaye/Kantrowitz, who from 1983 to 1987 edited and published *Sinister Wisdom*, chronicles these moments in a voice that is unerring, subtle and true. She insists on complexity, contradiction and ambiguity — even welcomes their richness and unexpected force.

The title story, "My Jewish Face," describes a riveting moment in the heat of a confrontation by Jewish activists challenging the performance in which there is a joke about the Holocaust. A young woman, a member of the theater troupe, chooses to align with the protesters — insisting on her "proud, angry Jewish face." The narrator, an

activist at a Conference not unlike the National Women's Studies Association, is reminded that we all, as Jewish feminists and lesbians, activists and organizers, socialists and religious women, announce and insist upon our Jewish faces in each moment, that courage is not a given, but a gift.

There are taut and urgent war stories which mirror the experience of women working in the anti-violence movement. Snapshots of a young woman, her face burned by an abusive boyfriend, another raped by her lover's friend only to have him doubt her; the slyly crafted pair of stories "The Day We Didn't Declare War and The Day We Did," about a possible murderous retaliation by frustrated and enraged feminists.

In "Our First Talk" the narrator is a middle-aged activist returning to a community in which she was a passionate young organizer and activist. Now softer, perhaps wiser, she has patience with the inevitability of the falling away of certainty; seeing both repetition and change, understanding that more and more complexity is needed to stay connected with each other in love and activism. In "Vacation Pictures," a woman reflects on the subtlety and emotional fluency required to love another woman with grace and with kindness.

My favorite story in the collection is "The Woman in Purple," whose central character is a 63-year-old woman who, while standing in line in a supermarket is drawn to Nellie, a consumer activist. Through her she is swept up into a political landscape filled with demonstrations, lesbian couples and the yearning this creates, efforts at creating Jewish ritual and political community in a time of AIDS. It's an extraordinary story about passion and risk, about mothering and loss, about the courage to enter when life unexpectedly offers new openings, about aging with its disappointments and freedom.

In the final story, "In The Middle Of The Barbeque She Brings Up Israel," a young woman breaks through a companionable but careful gathering of old friends and generations of family to insist that they talk about Israel. In her desperate raging, she insists that those gathered honor what they have always taught her.

The lessons of equality, peace and justice run through these stories like a prayer. There are no conclusions, no epiphanies, no certainties. There is only history standing on our shoulders, unbidden, daring us to show our proud, angry Jewish faces to each other, to our ancestors and to those who will come after us.

The conversations are urgent, raw, honest. Some of the stories are

frightening, violent as nightmares while the first autobiographical section is familiar and warming in its Jewish shorthand. Her language is not manicured but ragged, truthful, puzzled, demanding, painful and, finally, trustworthy. Kaye/Kantrowitz sees our lives with wry humor, sometimes with impatience and often with sophisticated astonishment. This is political fiction at its best. It is an offering made with insistence and with love.

"It was all far more complicated than I had thought. The only things that seemed simple were kindness, and dignity, and life itself, delicate and besieged." (p. 107)

—Sandra Butler

Enter Password: RECOVERY — Re-enter Password by Elly Bulkin (1990, 110 pp., \$7.95, Turtle Books, POB 9141, Albany, NY 12209)

Recover: To get back something lost, stolen, etc.; to regain health, balance, control; to make up for losses; to save oneself from a fall; to reclaim useful matter from waste — Webster's Dictionary.

"Recovery" is a charged word in 1990. It is the name of a lucrative industry; a loosely-defined, sometimes unstated philosophy; a way of life. People are for it or against it.

Most people use "recovery" to mean some combination of 12-step programs and shrinkery. Not all are clear about the differences between the two, or about the history of the term. "Recovery" started with Alcoholics Anonymous, with the assumption that alcoholism is a disease, incurable except through divine intervention. "Recovery" started with medical and spiritual meanings. It became a metaphor. People now say they are "in recovery" from compulsive gambling, going into debt, and being molested as children. Some think any obsession or compulsion is an addiction and/or disease, and don't bother with other analyses, political or scientific. The pseudo-medical meaning persists; people suffering from "diseases" seek doctors. Thus "recovery" usually means careless misuse of medical metaphors, a dangerous habit of calling feelings and actions "diseases," an almost automatic dependence on state-licensed "healers." Even members of 12-step programs (such as myself) can find the recovery industry terrifying.

Nevertheless, "recovery" still basically means what the dictionary says. It has no necessary connection to addiction or disease, to shrinkery or rejection of politics. It is a necessary, basic part of human existence. Elly Bulkin's book, *Enter Password: RECOVERY*, is almost unique in sticking to that basic meaning.

It is a personal story, one which took years to write. It centers on two aspects of recovery — regaining the lost or stolen past, recovering what's useful from it. It is both the process and product of Elly Bulkin's recovering the ability to write after several years of silence. This meant remembering things deliberately forgotten, breaking silence, first with herself and then with others. It meant learning — not honesty and courage themselves, but new habits of honesty, new styles of courage.

The writer "throws balls for (her) self to catch," hints explained only many pages later. Although she starts with memories of childhood sexual abuse, secrets of all kinds keep unfolding throughout. The theme is not childhood sexual abuse but learned secrecy, a learned habit of isolation; the theme is recovery of the person she was before learning secrecy and isolation as a way of life.

The "plot" begins with betrayal — but whose? Some of Elly Bulkin's friends and colleagues publicly accuse her lover of writing an anti-semitic book — and implicitly call her a traitor for having such a lover. Is it anti-semitic to write a Jewish character who isn't admirable? Her "friends" insulted her in print before a wide audience in such a way that she couldn't defend herself. Have they betrayed her? Or has she betrayed her people? Did she betray her people (and her parents) by being a dyke? Or did the Jewish community of her birth betray her by rejecting dykes? Did her parents betray her by teaching her to meet shame with silence? In this case, silence means not writing. The story of family silence is intertwined with the trashing story. She can tell neither alone.

She feels unfit to represent Jews. At the end, invited to co-edit a Jewish feminist magazine, she can't do it without explaining the whole story to the other editors — giving up control over who knows the secrets of her birth family and those of her dyke family. Now she has the habit of being out, not only as a dyke but in all things. Is publishing this book a betrayal of her birth-family, her ex-lover, their college-age daughter? Failing to publish would be a betrayal of herself, of the work she can do in the world.

Enter Password: RECOVERY takes the form of edited journal

entries — not my favorite genre. It has intrinsic faults: we don't know enough about her daily life, how she makes a living, which names belong to important others. Writing for oneself, one doesn't explain. A dream about cancer passes without comment. Twelve pages (one year) later comes the information that gives the dream meaning — for any readers who still remember it. The entry makes no reference to the dream. These unmarked connections are common. One has to read this book as a mystery, remembering the clues, or lose much of the information. The structure is often self-defeatingly subtle — an accurate reflection of the confused process of remembering, but frustrating to read. I would prefer greater clarity over this degree of authenticity. All these, however, are generic faults, which further editing could have reduced. The essential virtue of the journal form is more important for this story: it frees the writer from creating characters, from trying to tell anyone else's story.

I would have liked to know more about her spirituality. For many revolutionaries, spirituality is so connected with politics, not religion, that they don't recognize it in themselves. Elly Bulkin is one of the few who do. Anyone's recovery story is a guide to someone else. This one is especially valuable because the writer doesn't abandon her politics and values for a life of permanent self-analysis. Judging from a passing comment, she apparently didn't spend time or money on a shrink, although she bought books produced by the burgeoning recovery industry. As one of the major tenets of the industry is that recovery requires shrinkery, I find the lack of discussion frustrating. Did she make a political decision, or simply never feel the need? Did she end up paying for a shrink after all but never mention it? (I hope not!) Judging from the book, she learned to trust by talking not to a shrink, rather with a network of feminist friends also in recovery. If so, this is important. Others may not know it's possible.

For the same reason, it would be useful to know if she had more than a nodding acquaintanceship with 12-step programs. If not, that's important encouragement for others who need something but don't find it there. If so, that's just as important. How does a political dyke journey through such a relentlessly apolitical milieu?

But this is her story and she chose what to tell, guided always by respect for the privacy of others. I hope the questions she didn't answer in this book will start discussions elsewhere. And I (belatedly but joyfully) welcome her back to the world of writers.

— Rebecca Ripley

Lizards/Los Padres, short stories by Bettianne Shoney Sien (1988, 122 pp., \$7.00, HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061)

Julia Penelope has a theory that there are two types of people: "those who crave reality at any cost, and those who have to escape reality also at any cost." I put most lesbian fiction writers in the latter category. Lesbian fiction writers, in general, do to the reality of lesbian experiences what Kraft does to cheese. When I read, I do not want my attention diverted by apolitical happily-ever-afters, with Joe-gaywoman filling prince charming's shoes. I am a reader who prefers truth to entertainment. I read to know the real experiences, thoughts and feelings of real women and dykes who are struggling, surviving and inventing under real, oppressive circumstances. So I mostly read feminist and dyke theory, where lesbians speak the truths of their lives with political consciousness.

In *Lizards/Los Padres*, a collection of short stories, Bettianne Shoney Sien writes lesbian fiction, but she is clearly a writer who craves reality at any cost. *Lizards/Los Padres* is a rare blend of lesbian feminist theory and well-crafted fiction. This blend made me realize what theory alone cannot say, and what a powerful medium fiction can be for grasping political realities.

When I say *Lizards/Los Padres* is political I do *not* mean to suggest it's soap-box-fiction that begins, "once there was a girl named Jane. Jane was oppressed ..." and ends, "... and so Jane and her therapist lived happily every after." Bettianne Shoney Sien's stories are political because they are real, not just believable, but real. Her characters have gotten inside me with all their secrets and scars, hatred and hope, memories and desires. This is not spectator fiction. The characters have allowed me in to witness how the heteropatriarchal poison leaks into their lives. They are cautious; they don't tell everything.

In "Ida" a farm girl tells the story of her 12th summer when she's hired out to Ida to bail hay, and the following fall when her school counselor arranges for her to move in with Ida. Much of her story is conveyed in her straight-forward description of the new situation,

Well, I was pretty wound up in the beginning. Ida's house was so clean. Quiet, too. No brothers around to watch out for, no one

* Julia Penelope, "The Mystery of Lesbians," Part III, *Lesbian Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 11.

sneaking into my room pestering me nightrightimes. No one telling me what to do all the time.

I pitched right in. Started taking my workboots off before I came into the house, started looking out how I dressed (clean jeans).

I liked cooking for Ida 'cause she always said how good the food was. I followed Pearl's recipes, all neatly printed and filed in a little painted wooden box. We had chicken a lot; though I didn't like butchering, it had to be done. I feathered and gutted them, loving the silence of a quiet, clean house.

Bettianne Shoney Sien writes this story so we can hear the voice of one who would be silenced. This is political.

In "Wishing on White Horses," we get insights from Caroline and Linda (characters who are familiar from some earlier stories) near the end of their relationship.

The cars, bumper to bumper, have stopped. Linda rests her chin against the steering wheel before reaching over to change the tape.

She'll explain it all to Caroline tonight if she ever gets out of this traffic mess. It was just a rotten day all around, yesterday. Linda imagines taking Caroline in her arms, pulling her down across the bed and forcing her to see: *I'm sorry. It was wrong, but you wouldn't talk to me. My frustration level had been exceeded. You should have talked to me, I needed someone to talk to. It was such a bad day, no one else understands. Work was terrible, and then Lily brought all this candy, I ate a ton of it. I even threw up. I felt like I was going crazy all afternoon, I think the sugar just got to me. Did you know my period started last night after you went to bed? I love you and I'm embarrassed, and I don't care if you want to go away this weekend. Go with my blessings, and when you come back it'll be like a new beginning.*

* * *

She [Caroline] sat in her parked car on a gravel pullout overlooking the hills.

Hills don't have fog like mountains where the top disappears off into the sky, and a woman just has to be patient to see it come back into sight again.

Sometimes fog helps; if there was fog, I might be able to cry. But there isn't any.

Is it true, what Linda always says, that I don't trust anyone?

No. There's a good reason not to trust Linda.

Then why not leave?

I'm scared to go. I'm scared to stay.

"I'm scared as hell either way." Caroline spoke out loud. She watched the fog her words formed. She wanted to walk into the hills, but it was fall and the echo of gunshot in the distance kept her behind the glass.

I have read mounds of theory about battering and abuse. I know about patterns and escalation and the reasons that it is hard for victims to leave. In this story, Bettianne Shoney Sien takes these skeletons of reality and gives them flesh and breath, pain and will, complexity and depth. Theory does not grasp the rawness of this experience. This is political writing.

These are stories of girls and women and lesbians who are caught in heteropatriarchal traps, but they are *not* stories of victims. Bettianne Shoney Sien creates characters who draw their strength from resistance, from identities they have chosen for themselves, from their intimate connections with the women in their lives. Like most of us, they are not warriors, or (s)heroes, or ideal Amazons, but they are more than survivors.

In "My Mother Played the Accordion" a lesbian, alone, works through the terror of the past to get to the truth about her mother and herself,

I think of my mother's act of rebellion: she wouldn't live for them.
I think of my own and know: I won't die for them.

it is not because i don't love my life it is because i love it very much

I don't know what they see; I see my mother. No one tucked away hankies that day and said, "But what an accurate portrait Vera could draw, a born artist she was."

No one recalled, "Vera played a fine tune, that you could count on. That you could remember."

Maybe I was too young to know. After all no one really is a born artist. More than inclination it takes hours, money, and for a woman a voice in her own time that reminds her, "It is right to want to do this above all else."

Lizards/Los Padres has left deep impressions on my lesbian feminist consciousness. It stung me, soothed me, at moments it delighted me and it reminded me about the origin of my vision: experience. This is political writing.

— Amber Katherine

Books Received

Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras — Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color is an important and wonderful new collection of writings edited by Gloria Anzaldúa (co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back*), and reviewed in this issue. 1990, \$14.95, Aunt Lute Foundation Books, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures — 23 dykes, 87 opinions in this engaging, important collection of lesbian thought edited by Jeffner Allen. 1990, \$14.95, SUNY Press, State Univ. Plaza, Albany, NY 12246.

Confessing Excess — Women and the Politics of Body Reduction, a straight, scholarly, useful discourse on the weight reduction themes of confession and surveillance by Carole Spitzack. 1990, \$14.95, SUNY Press.

Speaking Freely — Unlearning The Lies of The Fathers' Tongues — an important and exciting analysis of how English developed to express and enforce men's domination by Julia Penelope. 1990, \$16.95, Athene Series, Pergamon Press, Maxwell House, Fairview Park, Elmsford, NY 10523.

Whence the Goddess — A Source Book discusses the history of goddesses and their functions throughout ancient Europe, India and the Mid-East, by Miriam Robbins Dexter. 1990, \$18.95, Pergamon.

The Reflowering of the Goddess — essays on how the power of the goddess is linked with and re-emerging in contemporary art, literature, spirituality and politics, by Gloria Feman Orenstein. 1990, \$17.95, Pergamon.

The Black Women's Health Book — Speaking for Ourselves — is crammed with information, essays, poems, advice, examinations of almost every aspect of Black women's health issues, ranging through childhood abuse, stress, diabetes, cancer, sickle-cell, sobriety and lesbian health issues, among others, edited by Evelyn C. White. 1990, \$14.95, The Seal Press, 3131 Western Ave., Suite 410, Seattle, WA 98121.

Out of Time is a lesbian ghost story moving between the '20s and the present, Paula Martinac's first novel. 1990, \$9.95, The Seal Press.

Voyages Out 2: Lesbian Short Fiction — exciting short stories by Julie Blackwomon and Nona Caspers. 1990, \$8.95, The Seal Press.

Dykes To Watch Out For — 1991 Calendar — 12 months of new cartoons by Alison Bechdel — get it while it's hot. 1990, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Scuttlebutt, a first novel on the world of women & lesbian Naval recruits in the early '70s by Jana Williams. 1990, \$8.95, Firebrand.

Night Train to Mother, a panoramic saga of four generations of Jewish women, is Israeli author Ronit Lentin's first novel. 1990, \$9.95, Cleis Press, PO Box 8933, Pittsburg, PA 15221.

The Lesbian Survival Manual — hints in cartoon form by Rhonda Dickson. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad Press, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

Club Twelve — patriotic lesbian espionage, a new thriller by Amanda Kyle Williams. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Priorities — the first in a sci-fi adventure series where women fight robots, by Lynda Lyons. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Theme for Diverse Instruments is a fine early collection of Jane Rule's short stories, originally printed in 1975. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Murder is Relative — family skeletons and living nuns entwine in this Brigid Donovan mystery by Karen Saum. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

A Room Full of Women is a novel of contemporary lesbian life and relationship dramas by Elisabeth Nonas. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Murder at Red Rook Ranch — 65-year-old Poppy Dillworth accepts her first major case, by *Wilderness Trek* author Dorothy Tell. 1990, \$8.95, Naiad.

Secrets — a second collection of good lesbian short stories by Lesléa Newman. 1990, \$8.95, New Victoria Press, Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

Mari, chronicles the relationship between an Argentinian activist and a NYC musician in the '70s, by Jeriann Hilderly. 1990, \$8.95, New Victoria.

A Captive in Time is the fourth of the engaging Stoner McTavish dyke mysteries by Sarah Dreher. 1990, \$9.95, New Victoria.

Rapture and the Second Coming encompasses the full spectrum of a young woman's acted out sexual fantasies, by Wendy Borgstrom. 1990, \$7.95, Lace Publ. (a division of Alyson), 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Doc and Fluff — *The Distopian Tale of a Girl and Her Biker* — a new, sometimes violent novel by Pat Califia. 1990, \$8.95, Alyson.

New Italian Women — *A Collection of Short Fiction*, 24 stories by 17 Italian women, edited by Martha King. 1989, \$14.95, Italica Press, Inc., 595 Main St. #605, NYC, NY 10044.

Coming Home — *peace without complacency* is about an activist's five-year battle to regain U.S. citizenship, by Margaret Randall. 1990, \$5.95, West End Press, Albuquerque, NM 87125.

The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction 1969-1989 is the first in-depth analysis of our "second wave" literature — destined to be a classic, by Bonnie Zimmerman. 1990, \$24.95 (hardcover), Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.

The Queen of Swords is a play which bends language and minds, coupled with several long poems, by Judy Grahn. 1990, \$9.95, Beacon.

House of Light, beautifully made poet's poems by Pulitzer Prize winner Mary Oliver. 1990, \$14.95 (cloth), Beacon.

America and I — Short Stories by American Jewish Women Writers — good writing, a few lesbians, ed. by Joyce Antler. 1990, \$19.95 (cloth), Beacon.

Returning Words to Flesh — Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body is a series of essays attempting to re-value the body itself by Naomi R. Goldenberg. 1990, \$19.95 (cloth), Beacon.

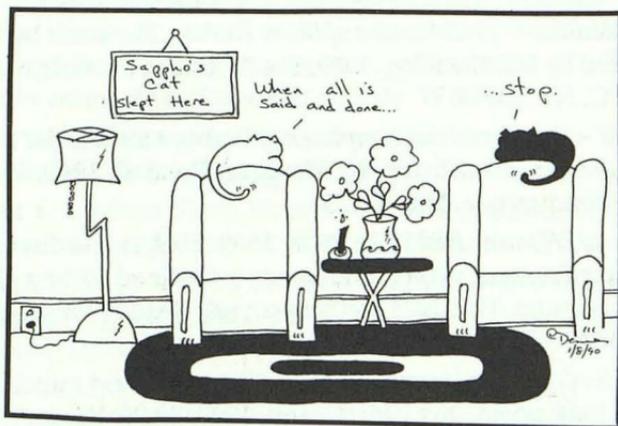
The Butcher's Wife is the story of a traditional Chinese woman whose husband's brutality drives her to murder, by Li Ang, trans. from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt. 1990, \$9.95, Beacon.

Proper Deafinitions — Collected Theorograms addresses incest, racism and the nature of language itself in a series of reflective texts by Betsy Warland. 1990, \$11.95, Press Gang, 603 Powell Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6A 1H2.

Stonewall Riots is a first collection of cartoon panels by Andrea Natalie. 1990, \$4.95, 7100 Boulevard East, Guttenberg, NJ 07093.

Before We Were Born — although the lesbianism is coded, these are beautiful new poems by Carol Potter. 1990, \$8.95, alicejamesbooks, 33 Richdale Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140.

Women with Disabilities: Issues, Resources, Connections — annotated and useful new package by Rannveig Traustadottir. 1990, \$5.70, Center on Human Policy, Syracuse Univ., 200 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244.



from *The Adventures of Miz Willoughby*
Dean Brittingham

Siné Anahita: I live on lesbian land in rural N.C. where I garden and live in social isolation. Besides ink drawings, I paint, do etchings and lithographs, wash drawings and collage. My radical politics and wild dreams mesh well with my status as a poor student and artist.

SDiane Bogus would like to thank you for reading her work and following her career. She requests your support for W.I.M. Publications (2215-R Market St., SF, CA 94710,) and her poetry press (see ad on p. 136). 44 1/2, Aquarius, Buddhist, Black, Ph.D. and author of six books, the latest two: *Dykehands* and *The Chant of the Women of Magdalena*.

Dean Brittingham: I am a 40-year-old radical lesbian, and I like to have fun. I love being a Lesbian cartoonist and photographer, and enjoy the irony, satire and beauty in life.

Sandra Butler is a community activist and workshop leader. Her current work is with Jewish survivors of family violence and partners of women with life-threatening illness. She has written *Conspiracy of Silence; The Trauma of Incest*, and, with Barbara Rosenblum, completed *Cancer In Two Voices*, the chronicle of a lesbian couple dealing with terminal illness.

Lisa Carlin: drummer to the revolution. She believes in collectives, consciousness raising and the evolutionary superiority of plants.

Michele Connelly works for the Artist-in-Residence program in New Mexico.

Anne B. Dalton: I am currently teaching Women's Studies at the University of Rochester and have recently completed a book on Djuna Barnes and childhood sexual abuse. Writing poetry has long been one of my greatest pleasures.

Sharon Davenport is an ex-angelino who has lived in the Bay Area for 28 years and has raised a beautiful boy. She is part-owner and full-time worker at the lesbian owned and operated Brick Hut Cafe. She has published two chapbooks of poetry, *Mountain Singing* and *Between Us*.

Elise Dodeles: I am a 26-year-old artist living and working in NYC. These early drawings helped me through a difficult period in my life when I was first exploring my lesbian identity. My drawings now continue that initial exploration, but with a great deal more acceptance and love.

Winifred Emily Eads: I am a 44-year-old white working class lesbian. I am surprised to be becoming the person I was born to be. I like to write, draw, pick wild roses out of hedges, dress up in inflorescent costumes, I like to watch how I converge as I go along.

Ruth Farmer lives in Brooklyn and is inspired by walking through the Botanic Garden, riding on the subways, and the ordinary things in life.

Francesca Forte (aka Fran Roccaforte): b. NYC 1956. Bay Area photographic-artist healer, videographer and wordsmith. Currently living and working in T.V., attempting to produce choice scenes from her cultured existence.

Tina Gianoulis: I'm a fat southern dyke of Greek heritage. I've written stuff off and on for years and have been lucky enough to have friends who've given me support to keep doing it.

Marcy Jacobs is a 31-year-old white lesbian from Illinois who loves reading works by other lesbians.

Beth Karbe: I've been a lesbian for as long as I can remember and, as a photographer, I make images of lesbians exclusively. My desire is to assist our individual and collective healing by putting to paper our beauty, our strength and our power as lesbians. (I'm also networking with other never-het dykes. My address is: 213 NW 4th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32601.)

Amber Katherine: I am sort of a dyke philosopher. Recently, my lover's crab cat, Kitte, has been amusing me with a piece of string. Kitte is a separatist also.

Helena Lipstadt: I live in Philadelphia and am studying to be a rabbi. Before this I lived for eleven years in coastal Maine on land which I owned with a group of women.

Anne Lundquist teaches English and Women's Studies at Elon College. Her work has appeared in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Women of the Piedmont Triad* and others. She lives in Greensboro, NC with Lisa, Drew, Chelsea and their cats, Zora and Christopher.

Jasmine Marah — enigmatic, eclectic, elastic, eccentric, enthusiastic, fat, forty, furious fotomaker.

Melizma Morgan: I was born in 1966 and became a radical lesbian feminist when I was 14. I have lived in Northampton, Mass. since 1985, and have recently begun half-heartedly pursuing a bachelor's degree at UMass. My dearest ambition is a feminist revolution.

Nancy Nachum: I'm a 43-year-old lesbian, originally from Montreal. My son will be drafted into the Israeli army next year. I've had poems on this theme printed recently in various feminist and leftist magazines.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner is a Philadelphia-based Puerto Rican writer and filmmaker. She has published in numerous journals and newspapers in Puerto Rico and the United States. She is also a founding member of the Philadelphia Latino Writer's Collective/Journal, *Desde este lado/From This Side*.

Ellen Oppenheimer: I am a lesbian and I make art which means that I have gone against the odds twice.

Deb Parks-Satterfield is a thirty-nine year old Black lesbian writer/poet/actress living in Seattle, Washington. "More Hair" is dedicated to her mother, Gladys.

Sudie Rakusin: I'm a lesbian and an artist, six planets in fire, live in the woods with my four dog companions doing some sort of art every chance I get.

Rebecca Ripley isn't writing much due to having injured both her arms. Her brains remain naturally curly.

Ruthann Robson is a white lesbian who recently moved from Berkeley to NY. *Lesbian Law* is scheduled to be published by Firebrand Books.

Barbara Ruth still believes in propaganda by the deed, revolution within the revolution and that patriarchy, in all its incarnations and infestations, is not good for Lesbians and other living things. An eco-anarcho-lacto-ovo-feminist, she advocated/agitates on behalf of prisoner rights, animal liberation and a revolution she can dance to. And that ain't all.

Sapphire is a poet, short story writer and novelist who lives and works in New York City. She is the author of *Meditations on the Rainbow*, a book of poetry.

Sue Sellars: sculptor, illustrator, painter — was born April 20, 1936 in Berwynn, Md. She's been an artist all her life. The study and observation of biological structures in nature coupled with a preoccupation with metaphysics has given her a very strong personal style.

Thelma Seto: I am a mixed-race, multi-cultural Japanese-American Eurasian born in Syria, raised in Lebanon and Iran. I am trying to bring my cultural selves out of the closet — a lifelong ordeal. I live in LA with my young son who keeps me honest. And poor.

Christina Springer is an African-American lesbian mother, writer and filmmaker. She is a co-founder of Back Porch Productions: A Women's Media Collective whose first film *Out of Our Time* is receiving international attention. Her screenplay, *Creation of Destiny*, has just received its first investors and will be in production shortly. Her work can be read in numerous periodicals including: *Sojourner*, *Mothering Magazine*, *Athena*, *New Directions for Women* and *Shooting Star Review*.

Proper Deafinitions is **Betsy Warland's** fifth book. She recently co-edited *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures* (Press Gang, fall 1990) and is currently editing an anthology of U.S., Canadian and Quebec lesbian writers writing on their own work.

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Announcements and Classified Ads

PUBLICATIONS

✓ *OUT/INSIDE*, A Women's Newsjournal Focusing on Lesbian Prisoners. Barbara Ruth, ed. \$6/yr, \$1.50 sample (+50¢ postage). PO Box 2821, Oakland, CA 94609.

✓ *HIKANÉ: THE CAPABLE WOMON* — disabled wimmin's newsletter for lesbians and our wimmin friends. Available in print or cassette. \$4 sample, \$14 indiv. subscription, \$24 inst., sliding scale available, free to wimmin in prison. Hikané, PO Box C-9, Hillsdale, NY 12529.

BRIDGES: A Journal for Jewish feminists and our friends has published its premier issue. Editors include: Ruth Atkin, Elly Bulkin, Rita Falbel, Clare Kinberg, Ruth Kraut, Adrienne Rich and Laurie White. \$7.50 an issue, \$15 year sub. (2 issues). PO Box 18437, Seattle, WA 98118.

IKON #12, out in Dec. 1990, will focus on *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Project*. #11 is a compilation of radical work from *IKON* in the '60s. Write PO Box 1355, Stuyvesant Station, NY, NY 10009 for rates and more info.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

BUTCH/FEMME — all forms, artwork, cassette tapes sought for inter-generational, multi-national lesbian anthology edited by Joan Nestle (co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives of NYC), pub. by Alyson Press. Send work or queries to 215 West 92nd St., NY, NY 10025. Deadline January 1, 1991.

SEVERED TIES: LESBIANS LOSING FAMILY, LOSING FRIENDS — anthology of losses incurred by coming out. Send submissions or queries to Lynne D'Orsay, PO Box 332, Portsmouth, NH 03801.

HURRICANE ALICE'S RESTAURANT — on the joys and pains of eating and preparing food — is the Spring 1991 theme. Submit in any form up to 3,000 words by December 15th to: Hurricane Alice, 207 Lind Hall 207 Church Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

BROOMSTICK WRITING CONTEST: all women over 40 invited to participate. Prizes, publication, subscriptions. Deadline: March 30, 1991. Guidelines: *Broomstick*, Box 251 RD #1, Uniondale, PA 18470.

LESBIAN MOTHERS' experiences in all forms for a pair of anthologies: *Sweet Woman-child Mine* and *This Little Man I Love*, edited by Christina Springer (see bio note this issue). Queries or submissions to appropriate anthology at 502 Livermore St. #2, Yellow Springs, OH 45387.

SEX/SEXUAL ORIENTATION WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION anthology — stories of fighting back through the legal system and other means sought. Send to: PO Box 14313, SF, CA 94114.

WELLNESS: Optimum physical, mental and spiritual health. An anthology by, for and about women. All forms. Deadline June 1, 1991; queries w/SASE by Feb. 1 to: Susan T. Chasin, c/o Visibilities, Dept. WI, PO Box 1258, Stuyvesant Sta., NY, NY 10009-1258.

BI-NATIONAL AND/OR BI-CULTURAL LESBIAN PARTNERSHIPS: Who/Where/How are you? *Find the Lesbians* anthology is looking for you! Write for guidelines to: Kate Pickford, #204 European Haitsu 15 Ban-Kan, Shinade 21, Yawata, Kyoto 614, Japan. Deadline: August 1991.

CONTEST

SPINSTERS' LESBIAN FICTION CONTEST 1991 entries must be submitted between Jan. 2 - Feb. 28, 1991. 1990 winner: Mary Morell's *Final Session*. Guidelines from Spinsters Book Co., PO Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.

CONFERENCES

NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE: DIVERSITY • SOLIDARITY • EMPOWERMENT: APRIL 24-28, 1991 in Atlanta, Georgia. They're looking for workshop and panel facilitators, caucus organizers, fundraisers, go-getters, workers and troublemakers: here's your chance. For more info & to register: PO Box 1999, Decatur, GA 30031, (404) 373-0000.

8th ANNUAL GRADUATE WOMEN'S STUDIES CONFERENCE — Plots and Plans: What's Cooking in Feminist Scholarship, at the Univ. of Mich. in Ann Arbor, March 8-10, 1991. For info and registration write: GWSC, 234 W. Engineering, Univ. of Mich., Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1092.

SUPPORT

✓ THE LESBIAN HERSTORY ARCHIVES NEEDS A BUILDING and we can make it happen! For 16 years the Archives has been housed in a NYC apartment and must move. Wouldn't it help you sleep at night to know there's a lesbian building where our work is preserved and cherished? The goal is to raise \$1,000,000. Can we do it? If every lesbian who reads SW got ten of her friends to send \$10 we'd raise over \$300,000 for our Archives. Let's try! Send donations to: LHEF, PO Box 1258, NY, NY 10116.

THE WOMYN'S BRAILLE PRESS has just celebrated its 10th Anniversary! Mazel Tov! If there are books or periodicals you want to make sure print-disabled womyn can hear, want to make a contribution to this great organization, or want to receive their quarterly newsletter, write: PO Box 8475, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

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RESOURCES

✓ NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOC. SCHOLARSHIPS for 1991 include awards for book-length ms., graduate interdisciplinary and Women's Studies work, graduate work in Jewish Women's Studies, Lesbian Studies, the Pat Parker Poetry Award, and a fellowship to a visiting Chinese scholar for research on women. Deadlines in Feb. 1991. For more info: NWSA, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, MD 20842-1325.

AD RATES: Classified: 35¢ a word, \$5 minimum. Display: \$150 page, \$75 1/2, \$60 1/3, \$40 1/4, \$30 2" x 2." 10% discount for 3 or more insertions. Deadline for Special 15th Anniversary Double Issue: March 1, 1991. Write us for other deadlines or special needs.

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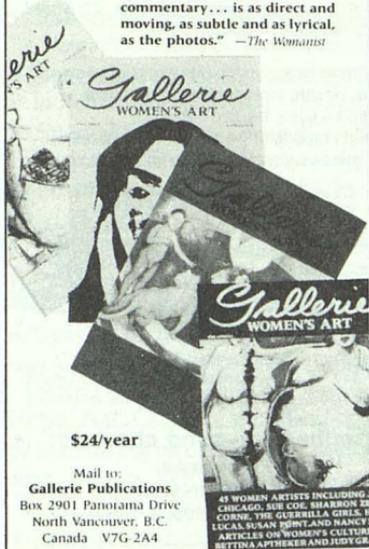
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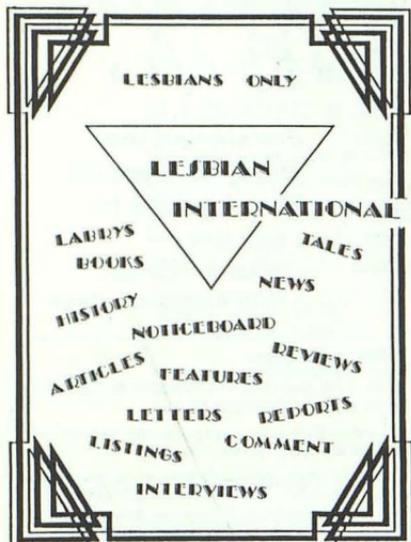
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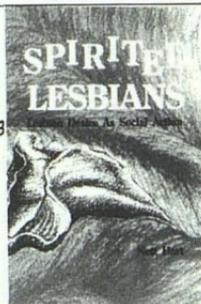
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All written work should be mailed flat (not folded) and SUBMITTED IN DUPLICATE. Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Five poems or two stories **maximum** submission per issue. We may return longer submissions. We prefer you type (or send your work on Macintosh discs with 2 printouts). Legible handwritten work accepted, tapes accepted from print-impaired womyn. All submissions must be on white paper, with the author's name on each page. SASE MUST BE ENCLOSED. *Selection may take up to nine months.* If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate, stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos, stats, or other duplicates of their work. Let us know if we can keep artwork on file for future use.

We publish only lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as lesbians of color, ethnic lesbians, Third World, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. See p.7 for details on upcoming issues. We are open to suggestions for new themes.

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Lesbian voices . . .

"When I lie on her belly, my nakedness sealed with hers in a black aura of connection, when I peer into the darkness of that connection, I know her pain, and I know it may take the rest of her life to allow me to love her fully with my hands all over her body, in every opening . . ."

—SDiane Bogus, from *Her Son*

"Jerusalem, I tell you, is a city made only for women. Only women deserve her soft hills, her low valleys, her night skies. Only we can keep peace when our anger's withdrawn from men's arsenals. Only we can be trusted with her old age, her frail shrines, her lost graves."

—Nancy Nachum, from *Peaceniks*

"Want you to be fierce
virtuous in presence
righteous in thought
imperious in spirit.

Want you to be
nappy, kinky, out of control
& threatening.

—Christina Springer, from *Wishlist*

". . . I needed a politic to justify my body's desires. I thought radical feminism was that politic; I thought lesbianism was 'only' the body's desires. But . . . as my daily life organizes itself around doing lesbian legal theory, I strengthen my commitment to lesbianism as theory, as politic. . . . Not lifestyle or sexual preference/orientation/persuasion. Not radical feminism. Not even lesbian-HYPHEN-feminism. Lesbianism."

—Ruthann Robson, from *Looking for Lesbian Legal Theory: A Surprising Journey*