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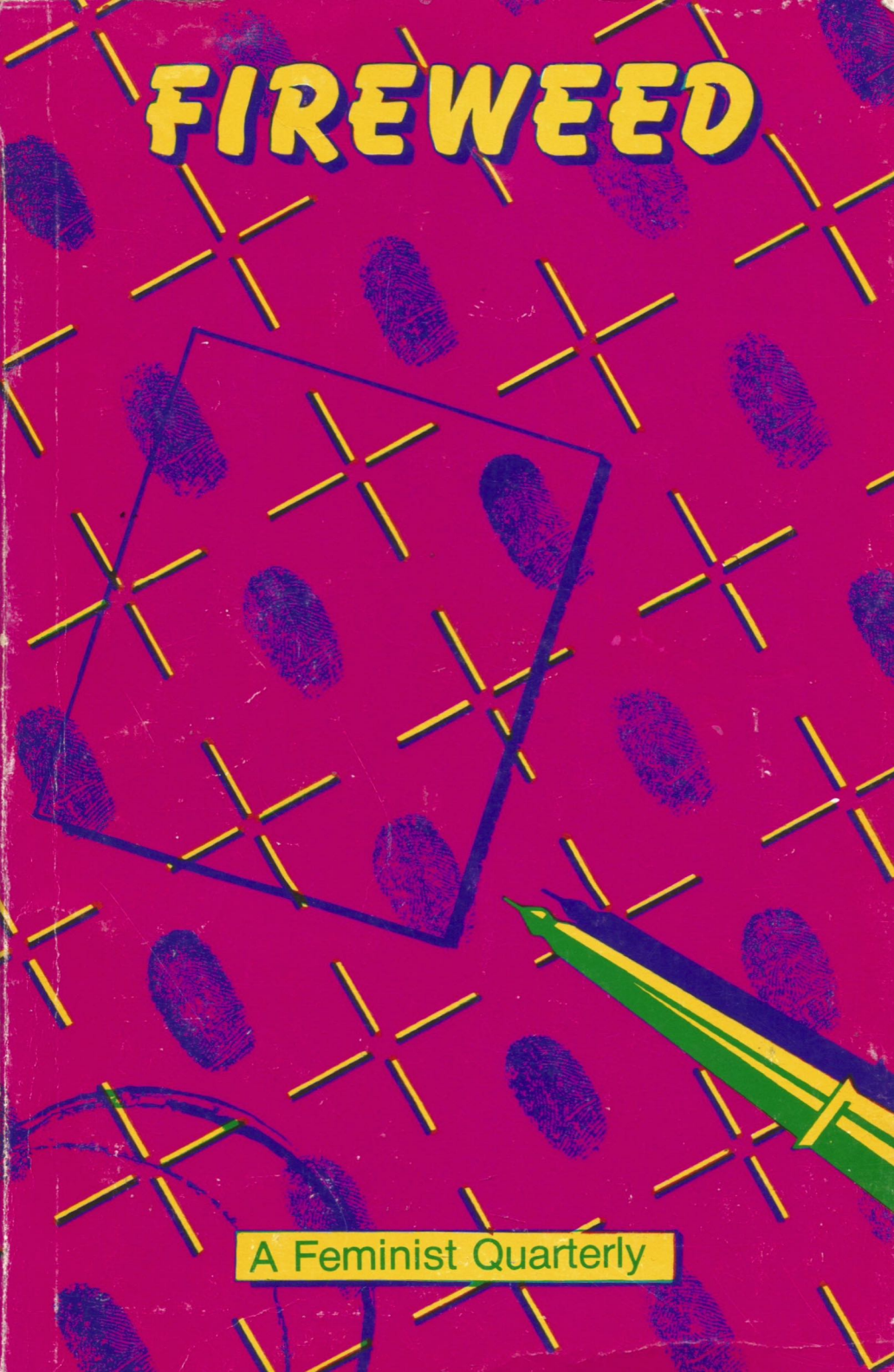

A Feminist Quarterly

FIREWEED

Writing

Issue 10: Spring 1981

A Feminist Quarterly

FIREWEED
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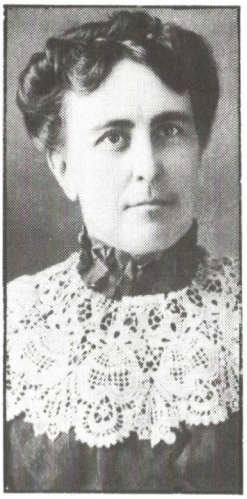

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EDITORIAL

With the publication of each issue of Fireweed the Collective members have had their comfortable notions about both literature and feminism challenged. Issue by issue we have increasingly had to define and articulate for ourselves and our readers our editorial policy. Because issue 10 is a writing issue, and for this reason much more open-ended in terms of content, we found ourselves looking even harder at our criteria of choice, at the way we make our editorial decisions. This time we weren't looking for a great story dealing with the needs of the handicapped: we were looking for a great story. Because of this, we got involved in an intense and often heated discussion about the aesthetic that shapes our publication.

"Aesthetic," however, is a word we feel uncomfortable with. It conjures up an image of tea gardens and plush salons and the refined contemplation of Truth and Beauty. We do, however, want to define a feminist aesthetic — a basis of judging the value of a written piece — and it's our responsibility as feminists to spell out for ourselves and our readers how in fact we make these judgements.

It doesn't seem to be a tea garden aesthetic that determines the content of Fireweed. The criterion of Beauty, in particular, is one that feminism has strongly questioned. When the Collective makes editorial decisions, we are looking for something that speaks to us

both emotionally and intellectually, something that has the power to move us. The edges may be rough: we're not always looking for polish. What we do respond to is a sense of urgency, of passion, a sense of something that needs to be said.

For this reason, you will find in this issue of Fireweed (and in every issue) individual pieces which may be hard to define as literature. They don't fall into conventional genres; they may not even fall comfortably into the category of "experimental writing" — the reassuringly avant garde. They will be something as puzzlingly simple as the voice of one woman, talking about her job, her art, a death in the family. We believe that these voices have a place in a feminist publication; you could say we believe in the validity of the every day.

Traditional criticism has decreed that of all the writing that is done, only Literature is to be valued and preserved. Women's writing is often personal rather than public. Our only audience is ourselves or our friends. And so our letters, our diaries, since they aren't Art, are trash. The collective feels that these "private lives" are not trivia, and that there is too great a distinction made between Literature and other kinds of writing.

Similarly, children's writing is rarely given the chance for serious expression. However, deciding on which of the many works we read should be chosen for publication again presented special problems. We found that children are acutely conscious of their audience. They know that teachers and parents are looking over their shoulder, eager to approve or disapprove and as a result, much of the work we read was stilted and artificial. It may have been appealing in part in its naivete and even in its sentiments, but the work rarely sounded anything like a child's genuine voice. We feel that the work we have published does in fact reflect the child's world in an unmediated way, the way the child really sees it.

In making sure that we represent these private voices, we don't mean to deprecate the value of an academic article or a sociological report. We want to make a place for the kind of insight only the analytical critique, the overview, can provide and for the kind of insight only a personal perspective can give. A feminist aesthetic must always be concerned with the vital connection between the world and the individual, between the political and the personal. And so in each issue we try to present a mix of voices within the political/personal spectrum, to range from the objective to the subjective voice.

This brings us back to our own concerns about the subjectivity of our judgement as editors, the bugbear of needing to be objective in order to be fair. Absolute objectivity is a myth (although at times a useful one). As editors each of us carries with us our own predispositions. Each of us likes the kind of writing that takes the same

chances with form as our own writing. Each likes the kind of writing that is working towards an analysis of the same political/literary problems as our own. But our safeguard against becoming either politically or aesthetically dogmatic is the way we make decisions: by consensus, as a collective. Each of us comes with a separate set of prejudices, and this forces us to represent, not one monolithic (objective) sensibility, but a whole range of obsessions, passions, styles. Arriving at a decision by consensus is never easy. However the end result is that we present a fairer and more realistic picture of the concerns engaging Canadian women today than we would if this journal were the sole product of any one of us.

And still we worry about being fair. How does an editor escape being swayed by the prestige of the established, the respected writer? It is so difficult for new writers to establish their credibility. We're committed to giving them a chance. The partial success of a new writer will be given more consideration than the partial successes of a writer whose craft and ability has long been established and whose level of work we'd like to see maintained. Part of our responsibility as editors is to make sure that unsolicited manuscripts receive some kind of critical response. For this reason we won't send form rejections; despite the extra care and work involved, we feel as feminists we should be serving not only the small group of writers whose work we can publish, but the large community of beginning writers whom we hope to publish in the future.

We'd like to encourage a dialogue between Fireweed readers and the Collective and ask you to send letters to the editors with your comments and suggestions. We want to be accountable to our community. We've also decided to establish office hours so that our Toronto-area readers can have more access to us, can drop by and ask questions, and talk with the Collective members. We'll be at our office at 280 Bloor Street West, on Tuesdays from 12:00 to 6:00, so please come by.

Carolyn Smart, Rhea Tregebov and the Fireweed Collective

CHANGING FOR THE WORSE

ANNE McLEAN

I liked going to visit Nadia just so that I could look at her. With her hunch back, her spiky hair growing down over her forehead like a thick fur cap, and her men's clothes which were much too big for her, she always managed to look ancient and dignified. As she stood there in her dirty little room, painting furiously, there was a sexless radiance about her that attracted me like magnetism. I liked to see her squeeze little worms of paint from her bag of tubes, and watch as she attacked them with her brushes. I loved to see the paint grow outward from the centre of the canvas, spreading mysteriously in all directions like a wound.

I liked to visit her for inspiration, when my own work was at a standstill. She claimed that she painted differently whenever I was there beside her, talking to her. In my presence, for some reason, the paintings would lose their billowing quality and grow much more formal and fragmented. She told me that this style of painting was entirely new to her, and encouraged me to keep coming back.

She always smoked and gesticulated while painting. She worked intuitively, talking incessantly about her theories of women, life and art. She used to say that the true lesbian did not exist.

"She is impossible in this society. Even where she does manage to appear, she is always the first to be sacrificed."

There were one or two disturbing things about Nadia which set her apart from other women in our community: her strange habit,

Maureen Paxton

for instance, of making compulsive sucking noises with her lips while talking, as if she were gasping for breath through a straw, or puffing on a very thin cigarette. This tic had plagued her for several years — ever since a man had tried to strangle her one night, in the corridor of a rooming house on Sanguinet Street.

Though not unattractive, she was scorched-looking. Her face was like a ripe fruit which has just exploded. Her voice had a grating quality, more pronounced when she was in a rage, but never irritating because the sound came from deep in her body, like an animal growl. It took some people a little while to understand that the turmoil of her exterior concealed a very calm heart.

I felt that she had come a long way since the time, months earlier, when I used to visit her in that other, much dirtier little room. She had raved even more wildly then, smoking cigarette after cigarette and pacing back and forth across her drawings with muddy shoes. Back then, I had noticed, she seemed incapable of judging her own work, of distinguishing the grotesque from the merely ordinary.

"What do you think of this?" she would ask excitedly, dragging a crumpled, half-finished watercolour from under a pile of rags and paper, and spreading it out on the bed. "Don't you think it is great? I am coming to the conclusion I am a genius after all."

Her exultant self-confidence embarrassed me, but I always agreed with her enthusiastically. There was something really very interesting about her work, though I (and even Nadia herself) was seldom sure of what it was. At times she had fits of fury in which she felt compelled to abuse and torture her drawings. Often I had to tell her to stop standing on one of them, and once I rushed at her just as she was on the point of tearing one in half.

It seemed we had the ability to quiet each other's nerves. It was as if when we met we instantly connected in some deeper part of ourselves where we were both very calm and motionless. As a result we trusted each other. After I had got to know her a little, I noticed a remarkable change in her work. Or perhaps it was because she had managed to find a new lover — a nurse — and was no longer starving and freezing to death at the Lido Tourist Rooms. Whatever the reason, her new work was excellent: sketches of iguanas and bulls; a portrait of a woman in a red dress holding a dead pigeon; giant birds with incredible flapping wings.

At last it seemed that she had managed to forget Mona and could work again — even if I hadn't been quite so successful.

It was late summer and I was doing very little of anything. My writing was at a standstill and I was considering looking for a job, though I found the prospects uninspiring. One night I had a phone call from Mona in New York.

"I'm working in a club on the Lower East Side," she said. "I want you to come down and see my act. I think I've finally broken through to something really powerful."

I went down on the train and arrived the next evening, and took a cab to the address she had given me over the phone. The place looked as I expected it to look: peeling paint and lots of neon. What took me by surprise was the photo of Mona in the window, and the name underneath it in gay nineties type — "Monique Lamour." So she was passing herself off as French again. But as it turned out, despite my embarrassment I was very impressed with her act that night.

When she came out for the first set she looked like an exotic bird. Her costume shone with black sequins which covered her arms and legs in a tight sheath. She wore a scaly looking cap to which long feathers were fastened, curving down over her arms and back like vestigial wings. Her hair was tightly braided in about fifty separate dark plaits caught in a knot at the back of her head with the tips just touching her shoulders.

In the second set she was less ethereal. She wore a red cape and tight black pants and played the matador, simulating a bullfight on stage. The audience almost lost control of itself. She had achieved that dangerous look men pay dearly for, and it seemed for a moment that anything might happen, that she had managed to get in contact at last with that power that has existed through the ages, and gone by the name of Babylon. I was struck again by her ability to be possessed by the opposite of her real, conscious self — the Mona I thought I knew. She could assume wild and hungry poses, like a woman in love with the larger degradations. She dabbled in a massive lie. The effect on an audience was always riveting. By the end of the night she had them bellowing like maddened buffalo while she stood, panting and glowing with triumph, and slowly collected the remnants of her costume from various corners of the stage.

After her act I went into the dressing room to talk with her. It was odd, coming across her this way in such a strange place and she sensed my alienation and seemed to treat me with some suspicion. As usual after a performance there was a dark heaviness about her; she was like some flesh coloured balloon which has sunk to earth. I began telling her how much I had enjoyed the show but she interrupted me. Dancing always made her ravenously hungry, she said, and she had just ordered a huge Chinese meal from the take-out place next door. When it came she devoured it in minutes, sitting on a bench in front of the mirror.

The next afternoon we went walking near Central Park. The weather had suddenly grown much cooler, like a day in late September. I thought Mona looked very strange, like a deranged schoolgirl dressed up for Halloween. She was wearing Harlequin-patterned tights, an emerald green tee-shirt, a little plaid kilt, and red running shoes. She called it her "Fall Ensemble." I felt that perhaps she

was tortured by guilt because of how she had treated Nadia, or temporarily insane, or both. But this shows how little I understood her even then. The truth was that at that time she was enrolled in clown school. Her success in the strip clubs was only moderate, she said; certainly it wasn't enough to satisfy her. But with her gift for self-adaptation she had decided to diversify her act — maybe take it out of the strip clubs entirely and realize her life long hope of reaching a mass audience with her message; maybe raise it to the level of, say, day-time television. She was purposely vague about her plans. She frequently diverted the conversation to other subjects, and finally asked about Nadia, a strange little smile playing around her lips.

"I hear you're a writer these days," she said. "I think it would be very interesting if you would write about Nadia."

"Nadia," she confided, with a look of stylish sympathy, "is too much in the Abyss."

I was trying to find something to say to both these strange remarks when she reached into her purse and pulled out some photographs, thrusting them into my hand. "I took these last year," she said. "What do you think of them?"

I looked at them. They were of Nadia. I was suddenly fascinated and disturbed, seeing Nadia's head (the head I knew, the head I had talked to many times) attached to a body I had scarcely even dreamed of. An eloquent, dramatic, yet modest body with its triangular patch of hair, drooping circles of breasts, big square hands. When the photos were taken she had been thinner and had just undergone a drastic crewcut, which added to the shock effect of her face as it stared defiantly and, you felt, a little shyly into the camera. And still, they were very erotic photos. Some went even farther than that. I handed them back quickly to Mona.

In fact it was those same photos I was thinking of when I ran into Nadia one night at Demos' Restaurant, two months later. When I walked in in search of something to eat, she was sitting near the back, sketching the couple at the table next to her.

"Well," she said when she saw me, "if it isn't our friend! Why don't you sit down? I have just been wondering about you."

I found myself apologizing for not having gone to see her since the beginning of the summer. A knowledgeable smirk came over her face. She leaned back in her chair, stretched out her legs, threw back her arms, and rolled up her eyes, assuming an attitude of crucifixion. Then she dropped her pose and launched into a long description of herself as a kind of female Julius Caesar, whose friends all carried concealed daggers, biding their time and waiting their chance.

She asked the waitress to bring me a cup of coffee. As usual, I

noticed, she was on very good terms with the waitress, whose name was Aphrodite.

"It so happens," she said, leaning forward, "that I have just returned from three months in northern Europe. So even if you had bothered to come, I would not have been at home."

Penniless as usual, she had hitchhiked from place to place and suffered many adventures. In Amsterdam, a rich Jew had offered her an enormous sum to paint his portrait, but had failed to appear for the first sitting. In London, a gypsy woman had stopped her on the street and told her fortune.

"She told me I would visit Spain and America, and that I had a four-year-old son. She said that two men were madly in love with me, but that I should be very careful because one of them was secretly married and would soon die of a rare disease. She said that when this happened I would have a severe nervous breakdown but would recover after a year. But first I would have to lose all my worldly possessions and lead the life of a common beggar. Finally she predicted I would achieve a great success and that I would end up in a bungalow."

She seemed to find her destiny very funny. She said the gypsy woman had tried to charge her for the reading and when Nadia had refused to pay had followed her for several blocks, shouting horrible curses. "It was terrible. She threatened me with everything. I had to run into the underground to get away from her, so in the end I wasted 15p. and got caught in the rain. But what really frightened me was the thought that I would end up in a *bungalow*!"

I asked her if she had seen Mona lately, and what she thought of her success as a stripper in New York. In fact Mona had turned up at my place only a few days earlier, with more stories of her triumphs in the clubs. This news seemed to throw Nadia into a black mood; for several minutes she sat staring at a jar of jelly donuts on the counter opposite, and pretended to be very interested in drawing it.

"Well," she said at last, "I can say that in my life I have seen stranger things than Mona's rise to fame and glory through pornography. I have seen sublime moments and I have seen mediocre moments. And this is definitely a mediocre moment."

After another cup of coffee she became more communicative. "So Mona is back," she said. "I hope I don't run into her. I advise you to keep away from her if you know what is good for you."

"Why?" I said.

"Because she attracts people to her only when she thinks they will be useful. Because she is a Puritan and has an uncontrollable desire to take her clothes off in front of everyone. Because her only pleasure is to be destructive."

Well, I knew all that about Mona but she still somehow fascin-

ated me. I saw it was pointless to try to explain that to Nadia. I didn't tell her, either, that I had been down to New York and seen her act.

But a few evenings later I was sitting talking to Nadia in her kitchen when Mona burst in. She seemed very annoyed to find me there. Without a word to either of us she motioned Nadia to follow her into the next room. From my chair I could hear them arguing in whispers for several minutes. I heard Nadia say, "Give them to me!" After a while there was a smacking noise and an angry shriek.

Mona came rushing into the kitchen, and told me to call the police. Nadia came in after her, her closecropped hair standing on end.

"That's right!" she shouted. "Exactly! Call the police! I have a few things to say to them about this woman!"

"*You* have something to say to them?" said Mona, with an incredulous laugh, turning on her. "What could *you* possibly have to tell the police?"

"Yes, I am getting to that!" said Nadia, looking at herself in the mirror. "I have many things to tell them about you, beginning with the fact that you are a prostitute and moving down the list in order of repulsiveness! I have a great deal to tell them about you! For instance that you have assaulted me..."

"Listen to that!" screamed Mona, turning back to me. "After she threatened to throw me out of here for no reason! And grabbed the last fifty dollars from my purse a minute ago! Call the police, I said. This has been going on long enough!"

"Call the police!" mimicked Nadia, waving the fifty dollars in Mona's face like a little flag. "It's been going on long enough! I am very tired of being your pimp on a charity basis! I am tired of being bullied! It's time I was paid for my services!"

"Do you imagine for a minute," said Mona, "that the police are in the habit of listening to *Arabs*?" But she glanced at me and said in an undertone, "Don't bother calling them. You can see that she's not in her right mind."

"Call the police!" shouted Nadia, pointing her finger in my face and gesturing toward the phone. "Call them! You are a *witness*! This woman has just slapped me across the face for the fortieth or fiftieth time since I have know her. Here is the mark!"

She showed me her cheek, which was a little discoloured.

"Don't pay any attention to her," said Mona. She went over to pour herself a coffee. "I think I should give myself a Tarot reading now," she announced loudly. "I think I really owe it to myself."

Nadia was standing in the corner of the room, examining her head in the mirror. "At least there is not much visible damage," she said. "Next month I am going to auction myself off for ten years. I am going to let some rich person buy me for that period. I desperately need the money. Of course I may die in the middle. Does that mean they will have to pay my funeral expenses?"

"Why not auction yourself to Sylvia Preston?" said Mona. Sylvia Preston was a dancer Mona secretly envied. She gave rare nude performances in avant garde galleries where Mona's art was unwelcome. She lived in the suburbs with her husband, a philosophy professor, and their child.

"That's a good idea," said Nadia, brightening.

"But first you should seduce her."

"Medusa?" Nadia looked thoughtful.

"No, I said *seduce her.*"

"Who?"

Mona turned to me and whispered, "And on top of it all, she's going stone deaf." I'd been noticing that. More and more lately you had to shout at her to make yourself understood.

"You know, *Nada* is threatening never to see me again," she went on in a low voice, scooping sugar out of the bowl with a tablespoon. (Whenever Mona was fighting with Nadia, she would begin to call her "Nada"). "She thinks everyone has let her down. She keeps saying, 'I am the poorest and the most generous.' Did you hear her? She always says that. It means she's short of cash again."

"Well," I offered, "you're lucky to have a pimp who's weaker than you are."

"She is *not* my pimp," snapped Mona. "That was a long time ago! And anyway, I just *gave* her fifty dollars."

"When?"

"In the other room when we were fighting."

"You said she grabbed it out of your purse."

"No, I *gave* it to her. What do you think I came here for? It helped to quiet her down for a minute, at least. You know, I feel very sad. I think she still hasn't gotten over me. I think that's why she's going back to Egypt."

Egypt? It was the first I had heard about it. I went to make myself another cup of coffee. I was experiencing a nasty little twinge of self-reproach as it dawned on me that Nadia was leaving and might never come back.

"Ask her yourself," said Mona, and when Nadia returned from the toilet we got her to repeat her strange announcement. Yes, she would soon be going to Egypt to see her mother, who had been dying for at least a decade, and whom she had not seen since her father's funeral, six years before. Her family, she said, were very well off by Egyptian standards, but they had disowned her since her decision to become a painter. Still, her aunt had promised to pay her plane fare, and the prospect of the trip seemed to excite her.

"Either it will destroy me, or else it will be an entirely new begin-

ning for me as an artist! Still," she said, "with all these peace talks going on in the Middle East, I think there is going to be a war."

She seemed inspired by the thought of her departure, and even compared it, with a loud laugh, to death.

"I hope that as a corpse I will gain a little more authority and respect around here. I should like to be here to see it. I am positive that none of you are going to succeed in living up to my memory."

After Mona had left Nadia laughed out loud and dragged me into the next room to have a look at the painting she had been working on before we arrived.

"Isn't it fabulous?" she crooned. "I am almost positive I am actually a genius."

It was an enormous painting. It was the one of the woman holding a dead pigeon. The bird seemed to melt into her, becoming a kind of hole in her body where the stomach or heart should be.

She showed me some more of her recent work: jungles filled with trumpeting women, guarded by parrots, while bulls rummaged in the undergrowth.

She confided that she had had a serious setback recently. The old age home disliked the mural she had painted in their dining room. They said it upset the old people and took away their appetite. They were planning to paint it over and withhold the last cheque they owed her.

There had also been an incident involving an Italian businessman who had commissioned her to paint portraits of himself and his wife. She had laboured all one night to have them ready in time. When she went to deliver them he had appeared at the door in his dressing gown, looked them over and asked, "How much?" When she hesitated he became enraged and shouted, "If you don't know the price of your own work then you are not an artist!" He threw the portraits at her and slammed the door.

"I was furious," said Nadia. "In my whole life I have never known the price of anything. I despise crass commercialism."

I sat dejectedly on her bed, staring down into a glass of coca cola in which several cigarette butts were floating. Her story had reminded me of my own money worries; for days I had been absorbed with the old problem of how to stay alive without putting myself out too much.

She showed me the rejected portraits. They were more like portraits of tumours than faces. "What an ugly couple!" I said. They really looked astonishingly ugly. "Would anyone in the world actually pay cash for these?"

"Of course not," said Nadia. "No one wants to buy the truth."

That was the trouble. When you told the truth, terrible things happened. When I wrote the truth about Mona and published the story in a magazine, Mona had horribly altered. When I revealed her

"How much?" When she hesitated he became enraged, "If you don't know the price of your own work you are not an artist!" He threw them at her and slammed the door.

secret life as a prostitute, trying to uncover, in her ambivalence and self-deception, something universal and worthy of admiration, I had in fact only created a flattering kind of slander. In the end I had only made her more insanely self-conscious and more determinedly hungry for power. I had given birth to a monster.

Why did I imagine that my attempts to turn life into fiction would turn out to be less repugnant than Nadia's horrible portraits? Why did I persist in believing that good comes from art? Of the three of us in this failed artistic triangle, Mona was the only one who occasionally offered the world something it could use. Mona who lied with her body. Mona the two-headed the money-loving. Whom I had betrayed with my pen.

"Don't look so miserable," Nadia was shouting from the kitchen door, as if my depression irritated her. "Do you know what we are having for dinner tonight? Sheep's testicles!"

She came into the room with a table on her back, looking like an eight legged animal. She put it down and crawled out from underneath it.

"This is our table for Thanksgiving Dinner," she said. "Let's celebrate it tonight. I am also on the menu."

She brought a crate for me to sit on. It had a coloured image of a lobster on it, and the advertising slogan, "FROM OCEAN TO TABLE IN SEVEN HOURS."

"Don't you know I am a deepsea specimen?" shouted Nadia. I noticed she was becoming fat. She had large, pregnant looking breasts now; still the coarse black hairs curling from lips and chin; the big hairy calves. I felt I was also losing my hearing. I felt like throwing myself at her and begging her not to go to Egypt, but of course it was too late for that.

She pulled a sheet out of her sketchpad and handed it to me. It was a drawing with a Camel's cigarette package glued to the middle, beside a triangle which was supposed to represent a pyramid. Scrawled at the bottom was a caption to the effect that all Egyptians paint pyramids, but none are able to express what a pyramid IS. Underneath that she had written something in Arabic. She would not tell me what it said.

Then she showed me a sketch of a woman's genitals, painted in watercolour on cheap newsprint.

"I did it just last night. How do you like it?" She tore a piece off one side of it, studied it at arm's length, and said with satisfaction, "Now it's finished!" It had been done in a wild frenzy, in black and red, using huge brushstrokes. I found it hideous and felt a great revulsion for it.

"Only fifteen dollars," she said, adding, "That's very reasonable, considering that someday it will probably be worth over a hundred."

I studied it more carefully. "Do you like it?" she said again. I nodded, cautiously. It seemed my first impression had been superficial: I was beginning to find it very interesting. She lowered her asking price to five dollars. I agreed to buy it.

She was elated. "I'll tell you what," she said. "Don't bother going home tonight. You can stay here and look at my nude pictures."

Without thinking I said I had already seen her nude pictures.

"You saw them?" she said. "Who showed them to you?"

"Mona."

"Mona!" she cried, and began another speech about Mona's lack of qualities. "Mona thinks she has proven herself at last. She believes she has attained a very high level of corruption. She read somewhere that the prostitute is the Virgin Madonna of the Romantics. Well, I am no longer a Romantic. Mona may think this is Berlin, 1933, but I have seen through her act, once and for all. Tonight when she was talking to you, I took the fifty dollars from her purse which she had stolen *back* from me while I was in the toilet. She will be very surprised when she gets home and finds out that her blackmail money is missing."

I hadn't realized any blackmail had been going on. Nadia laughed and jumped up and ran to the kitchen.

"And what did you think of my nude pictures?" she called from the next room. I said I thought they were nice. "Yes, I am very happy to have gotten them back at last." She brought in a pot filled with steaming sheep's testicles.

I could see she wanted me to participate in her triumph but I only felt uncomfortable. I found I had little appetite for sheep's testicles.

"Don't go!" she said, talking with her mouth full. "How old did you say you were? Only twenty-six? You see, there is still time! Why I was exactly your age when I began ruining my life."

I felt like a retarded child. I wanted to ask Nadia how she had gone about ruining her life, but I was afraid she would only laugh at my morbid curiosity. She must have noticed the question forming on my face because she said, "You're wondering how I did it? In those days I had a great future. But then I gave up my economics

studies at the University of Cairo and decided to become an artist instead."

I could see she was making fun of me. I remembered a time when she'd said, "You are fascinated by Mona because you imagine there is something evil about her. But she is not evil at all. She is simply mediocre."

I felt weighed down by the sudden realization that I had been living recently in a second-rate fantasy. I had a strong desire to burn my notebooks. For the first time it occurred to me that I was glad Nadia was leaving.

"Well," said Nadia, "you have never understood me, really. Perhaps when I am gone you will have a better chance. I am not half as ugly as you think."

She went on eating her strange meal and washing it down with cold coffee. Her eyes were glittering brightly. For the first time she appeared to be completely at home in the chaos of that room, surrounded by her half-finished paintings like a mother with her children. Out of her folds, many creatures.

"You'd better go now," she said. "Otherwise our conversation will start degenerating." I said goodbye and started down the stairs. Then I remembered I had forgotten the drawing of the woman's genitals and went back for it. It was lying on the bed. I found it reminded me of Mona.

A few days later Nadia's plane ticket came in the mail from Cairo.

Within forty-eight hours she had disposed of her belongings, packed up her paints and canvasses, and run out on her lease. Then (as Mona later put it) she flew away to Egypt "like Winged Isis," and immediately afterward everyone's life began changing for the worse.

Ellen Bass

Leave-taking

for Paula

Oranges sit in a wooden bowl,
small cauterized circles where the stems were broken.
When I tear the rind
the bitter oil sprays fine like breast milk,
but pungent.
Paula gave me the oranges.
Paula is leaving.

I held back, did not
seek you out, did not offer tea
when you brought pears
from your tree, each green fruit
dried in a towel.

And when you drove me to the doctor
while my belly grew,
weeks so hot our blouses clung to our backs,
and told me I needn't use baby powder, vaseline,
or keep water in the diaper pail, I
simply thanked you.

When Sara was born and you sent tulips,
brought squeaky moo cows and silver shells for me,
I was glad to see you, but I was not tender.

You talked too much, I thought. You
moved too fast. You cooked hamburger and minute rice.
You might
want something back.

But you were the one who took my child when I had to buy groceries
and my mother'd gone home
and Alan left for work saying, "How do other women manage?"

You were the one I called when his father was sick,
when my father died.
You cancelled my classes, took my place at readings,
fed the dog.

I called you when Sara had a cold.
I called every night.
"She won't nurse. She can't breathe."
You read me Dr. Spock
and half the Encyclopedia of Children's Medicine.

You were the one who showed me she could gum a crust of bread,
"She's eating it!" I marvelled.
"Everybody likes french bread," you said.

It was in your house she first drank from a cup.
You sloshed it over her chin and shirt
while she gulped big fish gulps.
"Hers is greedy," you sang.

Every Thursday when you picked her up
your youngest called, "Sawa! Sawa!" from the car,
and when I arrived, you'd be reading a book,
having knit a sweater big enough for both of us,
made dinner, driven to and from soccer practice
and written two chapters of your novel, while Sara
crawled calmly among the four small boys playing football on the lawn.

I didn't mean to, but (not even I
could turn away such gifts) I've grown
to love you, I love you,
the inflections of your voice, your heavy hair
held back with red barrettes, your small hand,
the way you reached your hand to me—
you were driving, I was crying—you reached
and covered my hand.

Paula, you led me through this passage
for which there was no ritual.
No mothers with strong browned hands rubbed my breasts with oil
or twined olive leaves into my hair.
No elders chanted a dirge for the woman who was dying

or blessed with the patience of date groves, the mother being
born.
There was no incense, no offering of grain, no moonlight, no
dawn.
Only phone calls from electric kitchens,
me standing amidst books, pots, dripping juice bottles
and you, on the other end, in your own pile of blocks and cracker
crumbs,
talking me through.

There will never be another year like this, this
first birth happens only once. My need
will never be that need again.
You have been my mother
as I became a mother.

It is early summer. You leave tomorrow.
We sit on your porch. Pears hang, tight pendants
from your tree. We will never sit here again.

Your children are making tents with blankets and chairs
in the living room, Sara has fallen asleep on the bed.
For these few moments, we are alone. You say,
"You are beautiful." I say, "I will never forget you."
Only bees stir the jasmine scented air.

Then your husband comes through the sliding doors
with briefcase and Sara crying in his arms, the
children insisting, "We didn't wake her, honest Mom."
I leave quickly.

Driving home, the setting sun tightening my eyelids
I see your face.

ANNE COLLINS

I practised the art of being occupied. I cultivated busy appointment calendars, sometimes borrowing the meetings of others, until each week was stuffed with names, times, tasks (pick up shoes, take Aunt Mary to the cancer clinic), until each small calendar square was scrawled black with the day-to-day. I layered engagements so that at any one time I was embarked on five and rushed zealously from one to another, arranging cabs ahead of time so that they waited, meters ticking, yellow guard dogs of my time. I became abrupt, decisive, insightful: theories on anything poured from my mouth, composed of overheard conversations, luncheon scraps, my speed-driven absorption with the news, any news, compelling me to read three daily papers in the blue light of a constant TV screen. I kept each little year so that in bleak moments I could thumb through and find my place, connect then to now, now to then, in arcane networks of latitudes and longitudes.

I kept scrapbooks; my workroom was fully organized under subject headings. I was a journalist of the emotions, tiresomely curious about those objects I saw propped on bar stools occasionally laughing or weeping. I probed with acuity; the questioner's art was

never better practised. I was a tactful ebb and flow that gently carried away the parts of people that weren't nailed down.

I am being a little melodramatic: it's the only emotional excitement I'm capable of these days. It takes a large echo to obscure the original cry. I am fascinated by documentary. My hands smell of newsprint, my skin of ions antagonized by the glow of the TV. I have never been obsessed, except by this recent need. I am not a dreamer. But I want to know what the plot is. I am looking for the hole that fits, for a vocabulary that makes sense. I am thirty-two years old, an awkward age.

Family. There were five of us, enough to guarantee the dynasty. I am the eldest. Smith, son of Smith, highschool history teacher. We still drift home at Christmas and Easter, following a vestigial instinct like dogs who circle three times before lying down on broadloom. We sit at the table making conversation about how Deborah painted herself all over with green housepaint the summer she was four or how my teeth looked before the famous orthodontistry that cost my father half his yearly income — flashing snapshots of ourselves as children to entertain these strangers, ourselves. Brothers and sisters slip away while husbands and wives interrogate parents for childhood beginnings of now-mystifying traits. We set off for far corners of the house, putting distance between us, still teenagers seeking privacy from one another.

Smith, son of Smith. My father speaks in orotund tones polished smooth by years of explaining. Though sometimes I can sense a slight helplessness against the reflex, a slight watering of the eyes, he was born to teach and will launch into a lecture unrelated to matters at hand with minimal provocation. A sneeze from one of us will bring on diseases of the Iroquois; the kind of leggings voyageurs wore; the methods of mortification of the flesh of early Jesuit missionaries. Hobby voyages he has taken in his spare time and knows he can't inflict on his students. All of us gathered together will feel a momentary communion as our eyes dry out while staying fixed on our plates and the muscles of our jaws contract in wide deep yawns, jawbones clicking loudly. Nevertheless my father has always seemed comfortably sure of his part.

I don't know. Every so often I get clinical, psychological, try to sneak up on this sudden documentary urge, ask myself leading questions. I've compared my upbringing with that of close friends trying to ferret out the X factor, and find that it is reassuringly ordinary. Except that I am not reassured. I know too much but have forgotten something important — a tiny heartfelt vacuum that is particularly modern. I want. Something that's not here. Into range of this wanting come little satisfiers. A ride on the ferry. A morning when

the air is the right degree of cold and fresh to suggest that something is about to happen. That vague.

My wife had made a perfect life for us, a perfect fit according to standard measurements of the last ten years. Enlightened multinational cookery, hydroponic plants in the closet hooked up to devoted little feeder tubes, the magic of tomatoes in January. Healthful country weekends. Elaborate exercise, in gymsuits, to combat stress, the great plague of the late twentieth century.

Then, I was teaching history. But no benign hobby voyages for me: I was interested in human catastrophe and taught it to thirteen-year-olds, cultivated the flower of despair. My wife Eleanor was (is) beautiful, good. She was sure things had a place, including me. She could keep busy and not feel anything missing. Except perhaps the child that would complete the pattern, that could be grown hydroponically. Swells with life, takes to visiting her mother and mine, gives up alcohol and salt, takes up the language of "we." Nine months of optimism. Of not having to think beyond the package of flesh slowly being assembled. Floating through time on waterwings, growing those little fingers, little nails. I envied Eleanor her notion of herself as a biologically productive mechanism with a specific goal. My aim was to subvert nature, pollute the water supply with infertility drugs. No tricycles, no tuition.

Here is a vestige of plot, later perhaps a bit of description to satisfy the basic hunger for facts. I left Eleanor one evening after watching her tan herself in the backyard, small bugs committing suicide in the oil spread on her thighs. I watched for hours waiting for her to speak. But she is one of those silent women. She loved me best when I was silent too. Leaving her my shape to fit the husband — my noise always detracted from the picture. I wanted to find out what would happen when my space was left blank. The narrative urge, I guess. Nothing much did.

Except that with free time I have become a great watcher. I make my students do the talking and watch all the soft mouths, half-formed beards and breasts, hearts beating with ideas borrowed from their parents or the newspaper. I make them read me the front page and then let them argue about it. They are so fresh. My classroom is full of cracking adolescent voices yelling about the war.

I look for long lineups to movies, concerts, demonstrations, and parades, then stand in them, striking up conversations with the people waiting just behind or listening to those just ahead. I examine shoes, hands, backs of heads, the way jeans fit, the gold ring with diamond on the hand three bodies in front clutching the shoulder of the woman in the fake fur jacket. I get a clearer picture from quick glimpses. I keep a notebook of such encounters and sometime they'll make sense.

I watch out my window through the layered-on haze of the city. Red windbreakers, take-out coffees, grey Mercedes parked in front of the typewriter rental, a stream of beige raincoats carrying plastic shopping-bags. At night I watch yellow squares of light in the tall thin face of the building opposite. Sixty-two windows, two windows per apartment equals thirty-one apartments. Odd number. Except for the occasional silhouette of someone seated in blue glare, the only sign that the building is not deserted is its lights flicking off rapidly after 11 p.m. in a sequence that never varies. Two people per unit, average family income at $17,000. Seventeen times thirty-one equals $527,000 or a half million dollars. Each apartment contains minimum TV, couch, armchairs, kitchen table, refrigerator, stove and bedroom suite, a capital expenditure (on average) of $3,000 each. Times thirty-one. I'm still not sure of the sum of my calculations.

Anne Szumigalski: Two Poems

The Poetry Award

This is a beautiful award he says, his eyes on the large crowds filling the garden and the roadway beyond. And he says it again to the woman receiving the prize. *Like a wreath of candles* he continues *or the pink lamps of a rhododendron bush it is beautiful.*

We have seen to that he whispers aside. She nods, looks down at her hands. *They are old for a woman my age*, she admits to herself. His eyes follow hers. *Gardening* he concludes without stopping his speech, without stopping his other thoughts.

The award is a pile of books with wan paper covers. She begins to read the titles for something to do during the speech. When she glances up the crowds have gone away leaving the grass clean and smooth, without litter. It looks like rain. The man puts the two folding chairs under his arm. He asks her to help him carry the rickety table into the house. It has a worn baize top. It cannot close its legs any more.

In bed at home she puts out her hand to feel the pile of books under the pillow. *I could have written all these myself* she says, *easily.*

Susanna

My third, the red haired one (isn't it natural that I've forgotten her name after so many years) was delicate from the start. She had the pale thin legs and protruding belly of a child who is never quite well. Of course she was not an active girl, yet how quick she was with her tongue, how glib, how sharp.

She could never bear to eat fish. I could see it made her ill even to think of it. On Fridays she was not herself, sat silent and tense at table. As soon as she was certain that no one was watching she dropped the offending food into the white napkin spread across her knees. Then she excused herself and slipped out into the hallway where there was a tank of great yellow carp. I could hear a light splash as she rolled the fillet deftly from the linen.

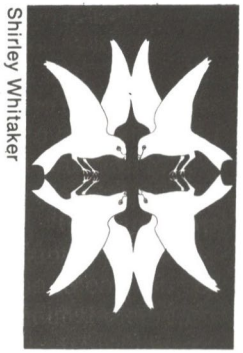
What made her so sure that fish would eat fish? They did of course; they darted at her offering in a multiple flash of gold. They opened their silly red-lined mouths and gobbled down the white or pink flakes. When all was eaten the child dabbled her fingers in the water and scrubbed them dry on the cleanest corner of the napkin.

One Friday she looked up and saw me watching her through the arch of the doorway. In the greenish cloud of her glance I read both pleading and rebellion. I decided it was much easier to accept her weakness than to challenge her strength and I turned away my eyes without a word.

Afraid that some evil would carry her away from me, I was always plotting to protect her. Every morning I made her stand naked beside her bed while I examined her body for warts and moles and cracks between the toes, for I feared that her vitality might leak out through these little erosions. When I found the slightest scratch I covered it with sticking plaster neatly cut into a tiny circle. It was lightest pink, paler even than her own pale skin.

At bedtime, while she knelt on a cushion beside my chair reading aloud from her primer, I searched the roots of her long red hair for lice. I combed and combed with a finetooth ivory comb. I had never seen a louse in my life but imagined them slender and brown with pincers at their heads, something like very small earwigs.

As I combed I felt sick dread closing my throat, for I knew that armies of these creatures could rise up without warning from her rosy scalp, that they were always waiting somewhere beyond sight to attack her from the shimmering ambush of her own hair.



Shirley Whitaker

Baby Swallows

Mary Meigs

In the barn — the sour smell of swallow
Droppings; chirps and warning bleeps
Of the parents, and a couple
Of babies on the edge of a beam.
What do they feel in that moment
Before the first launching? Every
Year there are some, over-confident,
Frightened or unlucky, and I find
Their bodies, two from last year, skeletons
Insubstantial and perfect as unfulfilled
Wishes. The older one, stripped and hollow,
Has lost its wings, baring the criss-
Crossing basketry of the rib cage plaited
To the backbone, ribbon-flat, punctured
For lightness, and leaning away from the
Airflow down to the sharp right angle
That ties their ends to the keel of the
Breast-bone. A tiny ship of death
With the figurehead of its skull, and
The big eye-sockets cupping infinity.
Their knotted necks, u-shaped, loop into
The slot of a wishbone fine as thread,
Floating the neck in a fragile cage,
Clothed in life by the bird's breast, where
The fat for migrations is stored.
The older one seems to have swum
Confidently as a waterbird
In the betraying air, with its
Legs trailing, finished by the
Curved black scabbards of the claws.
The younger, with impotent little wings
Upraised, like a child jumping into
A pond, landed on its heels, the supplicating
Wing-bones, strong-shouldered N's,
Firmly fixed to the butterfly
Plate of the sternum. A residue
Of his body is still there, held
In the ribs' embrace, with its sweet
Sickish death-smell as delicate
As his skeleton sarcophagus.

The following is an excerpt from "Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait" a book of memoirs by Mary Meigs to be published by Talon Books in Fall, 1981. Lily Briscoe is the struggling painter portrayed in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse.

Just as Chinese mothers had consented to foot-binding, my mother's mother and her mother before her had bound and shrunk their daughters' minds and their will to question the accepted order of things. My parents went to China for their honeymoon, and I remember my mother telling us that she had seen women with bound feet, as though it were not a scandal but a fact of great interest. She had even bought a pair of tiny shoes which I looked at without horror, and it was not until a few years ago, when I saw a bound foot pickled in a jar of formaldehyde at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, that the crime of foot-binding struck me with its full force.

How do the mind-habits that enable us to suppress or to torture other human beings or to fill them with guilt come into being? My mother's habits were set when she was very young. She was not a naturally rigid person (is anyone?) but full of delicacy and gaiety. *She* was "light." I know this not only from memories but from studying photographs of her as a young woman, in which her face was often transformed by the most delightful smile. I think of her in our family house in Washington and of my parents' room with twin beds made of mahogany, with flowered pink and white wallpaper, blue chintz slip covers on the furniture, a dressing table covered with little china and silver boxes. In the drawers of the 18th century highboy there was a sweet disorder of handkerchiefs and stockings and underthings scented with lavender and rose sachets, for even the messiness of my mother was charming, and on the closet floor, many pairs of long, narrow shoes in a row. I remember the sadness of seeing these elegant shoes and the hats on a top shelf, decorated with fruit and feathers, after my mother's death, testifying to her long sickness when she was in a wheelchair, wearing a brace, and when she could no longer wear them. The eloquence of a pair of shoes! Just as my mother refused to wear glasses until she could no longer read the telephone book, even at arm's length, she refused to buy bigger shoes when her ankles were swollen from high blood pressure. She was proud of her hands and feet, proud perhaps of those parts of her which my father had admired (she pretended not to know how to wind a watch because it pleased my father to think that she was helpless about mechanical things).

What a strange mixture she was of pride and humility, of grace and rigidity! There was a little corridor between her bedroom and my brother's, with a closet on either side, which you entered by a

door painted by my grandmother, a *trompe l'oeil* garden full of hollihocks and poppies, with the back half of a rabbit on the lower left-hand panel and his head and shoulders on the panel to the right. (I thought it odd that his tail came before his head and wondered if my grandmother had wanted to suggest that there were two rabbits chasing each other.) In one of the closets my mother had lined the shelves with gold and embossed Japanese wallpaper and had arranged on the shelves a collection of treasures: little tortoise-shell fans and Chinese bottles, cats made of lead glass, ivory and wood carvings, ancient Greek toys and Egyptian scarabs and fragments of statuettes. There, hidden away in the dark behind the painted door was the fantasy-life of my mother, like buried treasure. Outside the closet, my mother chose and arranged with her unerring eye and light touch and everything became increasingly formal as you went downstairs. Looking at the Empire of Beauty (a great polished highboy with bright brass drawer handles, with finials and ornamental carving like two breaking waves on the top. Someone was said to have exclaimed on seeing it, "It's an empire of beauty!"), the Chippendale chairs and Queen Anne tables, the mahogany table with ten leaves in the dining-room, the Ming vase on the mantel piece and the 18th century mirror with a carved gilt eagle at the top, you saw that other mother, composed of family pride, a less personal love for beautiful objects, for it might have been the living-room, the dining-room of any conservative American family with inherited wealth and a sense of its own importance.

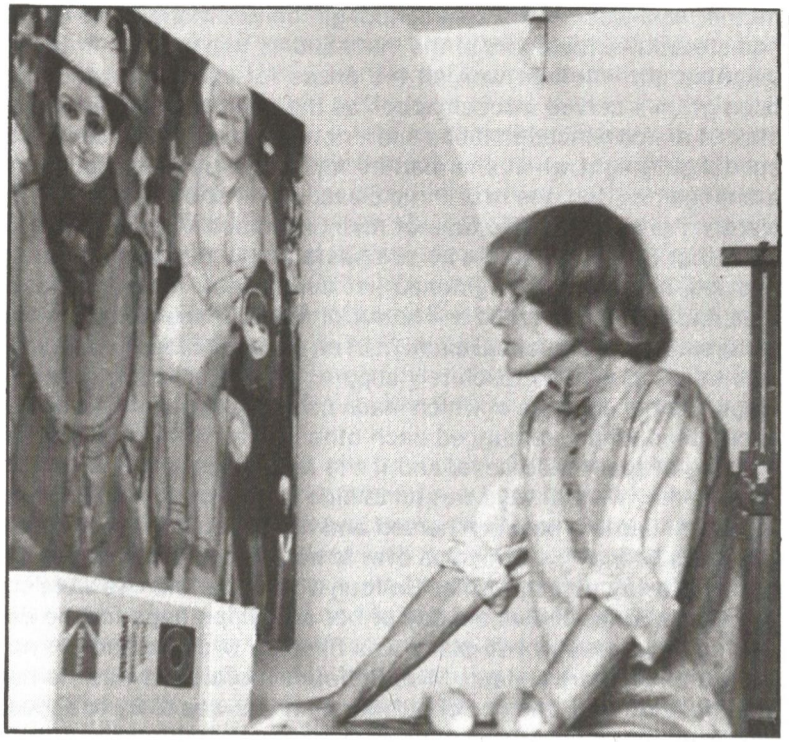
"Your mother was clairvoyant," said Miss Walker, an eighty-year-old friend who is herself a clairvoyant, as she gazed at a portrait I had done of my mother at three ages: young, middle-aged, and old. "You didn't have to tell her when something was going to happen; she always knew." Was this really so? I searched and searched my memory and could think of no examples of my mother's clairvoyance. But I knew that Miss Walker could see things in her that are unknown to me, things that I can hunt for and never find. The magic being shut up in the conventional woman, the paradox of the bird in its cage that refuses to walk out the open door, who does not see that the door is open, and, caught forever in her cage-habits, does not care.

"I see a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand," one of my brothers would say (I have two older brothers and a non-identical twin sister), and my twin sister and I would laugh nervously, knowing that he spoke of a storm brewing in our mother, spawned we knew not how. She had what we called her "black look"; it came from something one of us had said or done, something which in retrospect often seems ludicrously innocent. The black look dated from a time long before we even named it and could cast a shadow over the sunniest day. It appeared as a sign that somehow, without

intending to, one of us had done something wrong — even when we were too young to have precise ideas about wrongness. The special force of our mother's anger lay in its delayed action, for time, instead of dissipating it, made it more powerful. Perhaps people whose anger slowly gathers are working up the courage to let it out, or perhaps they have the mistaken impression that delayed anger is easier to take than an immediate explosion. My mother's anger was terrible because it had its effect during the whole time it was gathering, a time we spent thinking of every reason for guilt except the right one.

I remember when I was more than twenty years old feeling the weight of my mother's stern eyes on me at the dinner table, willing me to meet her gaze, while I looked at my plate, and remember slithering guiltily around the house while the cloud no bigger than a man's hand grew into a towering thunderhead — and finally broke when she caught me. "You do NOT say to a young man that you've seen your sister in her pyjamas!" she threw at me like a lightning-bolt. On this occasion, one of my sister's suitors who was a house-guest had descended for breakfast and had asked where my sister was. My mother had overheard the fatal words, "The last time I saw her she was in her pyjamas." This prudery is unimaginable now (as it was even then) but it shows in what a senseless atmosphere of prohibition we grew up. When I went to boarding-school, the rules, the days like mined fields that had to be crossed, seemed perfectly natural to me, even a welcome relief from home, since the rules, ridiculous though they were, were so to speak visible (don't sit on your bed or don't "communicate" in study hall). At home, there were rules that regulated not only our behavior and our conversations, but our thoughts. The mere use of the word pyjamas (or worse still, "bed") evidently suggested sex to my mother — or did she fear that these words would suggest sex to *me*? But she needn't have been afraid; our training had been so thorough that nothing suggested sex to me. I would like to know the reason for her real terror of sex, a fear that went beyond convention.

Our parents belonged to a moral school in which guilt was presumed, and it was useless to argue. The wonder of it was that we never "said things" but were scrutinized in the event that we might. The thoughts *might* come into our heads. How else explain my mother's rush to silence the orchestra, playing in our house for our first dance, when they started to play "It's Sleepy Time Down South?" One would think that this *sleepy* time would preclude thoughts about sex, but to my mother it suggested them and would suggest them to us. Our parents' ideas about the crime of sex made their children's lives arid, guilt-ridden or punitive (in my brothers' case) for a long time. Of my brothers' lives when they were growing up I know little but imagine much. During the war, when I



Lucile Leduc

was twenty-four years old and lived in our house in Washington, I was embraced (only that) at intervals by a married cousin who spent the night now and then and professed to be "crazy about" me. Laughing, I recounted this to my brother, who turned white with rage. "I'm going to tell Mother," he said. I imagined the sequence of events: my cousin disgraced and thrown out of the house, my mother forever unforgiving. "No, no, no, I can handle it! I promise you I can, I will..." That moral rage, so familiar to me, fashioned from something as insubstantial as smoke, an idea that hardens the heart and makes people willing to destroy each other in its name. One can almost make an equation — that moral outrage is multiplied by the craziness of the idea held and that the more the idea is untenable, the more drastic the punishment for the person breaking its law. The worst punishments have been devised for yielding to the greatest and most ineradicable temptation — sex and the enjoyment of it. I am convinced that my mother belonged to the species of those who are not tempted but are disgusted by those who have been and have not resisted. Those who *have* resisted temptation can be as ruthless as those who have never been tempted.

But all this moral intransigence and sternness wasn't our real

mother, who was an innocent school-girl on whom the doors of life had closed like the doors of the Iron Maiden. She was the brilliant, laughing girl who had won all the prizes for excellence and had been given a carved wooden spoon as the most popular girl in her class. I am convinced that she knew nothing about life except as a school-girl might when she married my father, as beautiful as an archangel; he, too, the first in his class. Didn't she say once to my sister, "I cried the whole time of my honeymoon?" So here was a clue, that my father, who was as chaste as my mother when they married, had perhaps frightened her during their first night together, and that this created the horror of sex that she visited on her children. There is a sexual element in all physical tenderness and it was this that was so resolutely suppressed in our family relationships and the absence of which made us so cool and awkward with each other. When we hugged each other it was without the lovely yielding of real tenderness, and if the latter existed between our parents they were always careful to hide it from us. My mother created fatal barriers between herself and her children in the name of what was "done" by turning us over to nurses and governesses, by giving us away, in fact, to Miss Balfour, who came when we were six years old (I cried the whole day of her arrival, perhaps for the departing governess whose place was filled by Miss B.) and did not leave until we were sixteen. Miss Balfour's moral stuff was sterner than our mother's, and one of our worst crimes was to try to appeal to our mother over Miss Balfour's head. Miss Balfour liked little boys better than little girls; "little girls are deceitful," she said. Miss Balfour had thick, wavy hair, a fresh pink face and beautiful grey eyes; if she had been as kind to us as she was to our brothers I would have loved her, too, but she was short-tempered and sometimes downright mean. Sometimes she slapped us or pinched our arms just above the elbow as we walked down the street on either side of her — in order to make some moral point. We became deceitful to outwit her and this must have been exasperating, not to mention the strain of being, in effect, a rival mother with an even more rigid sense of discipline and a keener eye for moral lapses than our real mother had.

As the years went on and Miss Balfour made herself indispensable, our mother tried more and more frantically to get out of the trap she had made for herself. She suffered torments of jealousy. For a time, until she put an angry stop to it, our older brother used to go and kiss Miss Balfour goodnight, as she lay in bed in her schoolgirl nightgown. In any other family, things would have gone further than this, but in ours the act of kissing your governess goodnight if you were a boy of sixteen was as scandalous as fornication. Yet after this episode Miss Balfour stayed with us for five more years. Even after she left, her ghost haunted my mother. My father, who had always defended Miss Balfour and considered her a necessary part of the family, arranged for her operation after she had left and visited her after it in the palatial mansion of her new family to see how she was getting on. This got to the ears of my mother (he had evidently not dared to tell her, a fact of some significance if one is searching in the shadows for the truth) and caused another upheaval. Looking back, I remember a period when my mother was continuously in her black state, when she cried day after day. A worldly-wise reader might say that something was certainly going on between my father and Miss Balfour, a reader who did not know my parents or Miss Balfour, did not know that the idea of sexual wrongdoing was as terrible as if the act had been committed. It was precisely because there was no accusation my mother could make, that she had no pretext for firing Miss Balfour, that her torment was more acute.

After Miss Balfour left us, she took care of a series of little boys and we would go and visit her. When I saw how tender she was with one of them, how patient, I wept, broke down completely, and Miss Balfour was loving and patient with *me*. By then she had suffered the torments of *tic douleureux*, had been operated on so that her face was partly paralysed, and her hair had turned white. I realized how we are formed by the relation we have one to the other, how the words "governess-charges" (that was the word used then) had made Miss Balfour an overseer and us her slaves, how she was ruled by the idea of what she thought we should be, how she thought we should behave, how perhaps she hated having two sneaky and loveless little girls as "charges" and her essential good nature was twisted and deformed, how happy we were to become friends, to be able to behave as friends. Just as our mother was held in the iron frame of the words "mother-governess" and "mother-children."

Miss Balfour's presence in our family created a lethal triangle, and I see now that this is what poisoned that period of my mother's life, her powerlessness to reach her children, her conviction that Miss Balfour had stolen our love. Our poor mother spent the years after Miss Balfour's departure yearning for her lost children and not knowing how to go about getting them back. By then we were miles away from her, keeping our lives a secret from her, punishing her, it would seem, for having given us away. After my father's death she lived alone in the big house, trying to carry on her old life, as brave as any soldier, and I can't think of it now without pain. How little we knew of each other, how incapable we were of talking! I remember again the bitter accusaton that shot out of her, when, questioning the imminent marriage of a friend and her doubts, I said, "Does she really love him?" "*Cold heart, what do you know about love?*" I hated her at this moment, and yet, what evidence did my unloved mother have that I knew anything about

love? And if she had had the evidence, wouldn't her bitterness have been even greater, as it was on another occasion (I was going to visit a friend I loved, but of the love I could say nothing), "*Another woman?*"

Even my sister was unapproachable, embarrassed and cool when our mother suddenly said to her (they were sitting on a park bench and it was after our father's death), "Can't you love me a little?" We all felt, and I knew, that she couldn't possibly understand our lives, and that there was no use in trying to talk to her, for hadn't she always been shocked by even the tiniest infraction of her rules? It was much easier to stay on safe ground, to talk about my teaching, my painting, to go to concerts with her, yes, like schoolgirls, and to stay away from dangerous subjects. But why did even these safe subjects create conflicts, why did it seem to me that there was nothing in the world that I agreed with my mother about — when now I have the impression that I never bothered really to draw her out? Hadn't she read all the French classics, seen innumerable operas and plays (my mother liked naughty drawing-room comedies and laughed at behaviour that shocked her in real life. "But it's a play," she said, when I pointed this out to her)? She loved chamber music and went, year after year, to the concert series at the Coolidge Auditorium in Washington. But something prevented me from believing that this cultivation of hers was real, for she was unable to discuss why or how she loved books and music. A few years before her death (she died at seventy-six), when she was paralysed and talked with difficulty, I arranged with a violinist friend to come and play for her in our house and warned him that she might be impatient, or even rude, as she was at times with visitors. He played the Bach partita in B minor, perhaps the most exacting of all Bach to listen to, and my mother, far from being impatient, sat enthralled, and afterwards thanked him in the words she could muster. And I felt horribly ashamed, once again, of my arrogance, of the false idea I had had of my mother's feeling about music. And realized that even if she found the Bach partita hard to listen to, there was something graciously receptive at the very core of her being, stronger than her sickness, that recognized great music played by a master.

My mother had always been humble, much too humble, I thought, impressed by any kind of accomplishment as long as it was accomplished by an outwardly virtuous person, and this humility appeared in her either as a strength or a weakness. In its strong aspect it made her capable of listening to the Bach partita, of a silent worship of great art. But her character was fatally shaped by the humility that made her deny her own value and accept the impersonal judgements of society. When she married, she switched her political allegiance from Republican to Democrat, because my father

was a Democrat, and from then on she accepted everything the Democrats did without question. Humility was her primal matter and out of it was fashioned her self-denial, her ferocious loyalties and her snobbishness. She had been humiliated by her mother-in-law because she came from a small town, and her life in Washington was a long effort to keep a high place on the social ladder.

But my mother's closest friends were less often the great matrons of Washington than maiden ladies, relatively simple people of sterling character, who often gave me the impression of having stepped from the pages of Dickens. Even when I was young they seemed to belong to a vanishing species, to be squeezed into a shrinking habitat. They had never left a kind of moral Garden of Eden and were only dimly aware of the horrors beyond its boundaries. Some of them were southern ladies of genteel birth, whose fortunes had shrunk and who were forced to find jobs. Such was Miss McCantz from Charleston, South Carolina, who dressed in the style of the late 19th century, wore a black ribbon around her neck, pronounced garden "gy-arden," and was selected to be our chaperone when we (the twins) were sent to Switzerland to learn French. Such was Miss Graves from North Carolina, descendant, she said, of the distinguished politician John C. Calhoun. Southern ladies like these were unable to adapt to change, particularly in the status of black people, and Miss Graves had a nervous breakdown when she went to work in the Navy and found them working beside her. She attached herself to me at this time (I was working as a WAVE in the same building) with the desperation of a drowning person, and I remember my mother telling me that when she was taken to the asylum, she saw a black person at one of the windows and began to scream. This made me regret my impatience at Miss Graves' racism, for by then, aged twenty-five, I had learned to feel sympathy for irrational terrors. Miss Graves was no more responsible for her racism than my mother was for her fear of sex; indeed, both were a legacy of society's blindness and repression. But when we were seventeen my sister and I considered our mother's Dickensian friends, whom she always called *Miss* McCantz or *Miss* Graves, to be old-fashioned wierdos, and made fun of them behind their backs.

Those she called by their first names were all summer friends; with these she laughed and was happy. But even here was one whose name brought forth my mother's humility. This was Helen L., who actually knew Thornton Wilder and other giants, and who founded the Reading Club of which my mother was a member. As I chase after wisps of memory, think of the high seriousness my mother put into doing homework for the meetings of the club, think of her real awe of Helen L., a genuine intellectual, of her awe of another friend whose mother had been the first editor of Emily Dickinson, I see her in all her touching innocence, and see how of-

fensive I was with my mocking sarcasm. Sometimes I would overhear conversations between the friends which touched, not on literature, but the "servant problem" (a problem which in those days could hardly be said to have existed) or about their husbands' little foibles. I remember uneasily noticing that their indulgent remarks about their husbands always implied their sense of themselves as *wives*. One and all (even Helen, whose husband was a distinguished scientist) believed in the superiority of their husbands to themselves, I saw with disgust, and within this rigid framework, they were quite happy to live and turn any spark of rebellion into a tender joke. These were the terms then of happy marriages — and they were all happily married, for my mother's moral canon excluded even unhappily married people. It was the wife's fault, she firmly believed, if a marriage failed.

In the warm sunshine, in the gaiety of picnics and game parties (the whole of our summer community had a passion for charades, "The Game," as it was called, and others of that ilk), in the joy of her garden full of heliotrope and lavender, lemon verbena, rose geranium, all my mother's sweetness seemed to flourish. True, her loyalty to the Episcopal Church provoked a certain grimness and I see her now of a Sunday morning, wearing her hand-knitted white wool suit, her hat adorned with plastic cherries, and her narrow, pointed shoes, rounding up a cranky flock of children and grandchildren (the latter in starched seersucker and knee socks with doleful expressions on their faces) for the eleven o'clock service. That was the trouble, that the superego was always at hand telling her how to behave, telling her she had to go to church every Sunday until she could no longer walk, telling her to badger her children and grandchildren and to be gravely offended if one of them refused. I was the one who refused, and that created another rift between my mother and me, for I refused first to take Communion and then to go to church at all. There was always in my mother a threshhold where laughter stopped, where the rules were invoked and where discussion became impossible. Her summer gaiety was illusory. Alas, none of us ever succeeded in turning this intractable morality of hers into a joke, and the sins we had committed remained fresh in her mind like prehistoric animals preserved in a glacier.

The summer mother and the winter mother were the same person; it was just that in winter there was a concentration of loyalties that required her constant attention. In society she became a redoubtable hostess, in politics she became president of the Women's National Democratic Club, and as a mother she worked to see that her daughters could ride horseback, dance, speak French, and go to the best boarding schools. Our brothers, however, were not polished in the same way and continued to go to our first Quaker school and to be ignorant of the arts of riding and

dancing, and it was obvious that she was grooming us to be wives, for she drew the line at a college education (we rebelled, however) and put her ambitions and energies into our "coming-out," which failed signally to get us husbands. I am grateful to her now for her zeal, and thankful that among her failures was the one to make us carbon copies of herself. None of us can believe in the things she believed in with the same fierceness. And how surprising that a person so modest could be so fierce! "Your mother is the sweetest, loveliest person!" her friends would say. At her grand dinner parties she always prevented conversations from becoming heated ("I never talk about politics at the dinner table," she would say), and I can see her beaming face at her end of the long table, her head graciously turning from left to right, or, spotting a guest who hadn't spoken, launching a question that would draw him out. She was much loved for these qualities by the courtly gentlemen of Washington.

So it amazes me that she could put so much moral energy into the most insubstantial beliefs. I remember that summer mother, the light-hearted one, and her fury when the curly-haired, black-eyed minister of our Church one Sunday began intoning the Creed. She and her friends assembled and inveighed against the dangers of becoming "high church," seeing the minister, who refashioned every church he came to in the image of his love for music, for sculpture and flowers, as an emissary of the Pope himself. To him it was natural to inject a little art into the Episcopal service; to my mother it was a crime. She won, of course, and eventually our little minister, the only one of his kind I ever felt close to, changed to a church that was "higher" where he could let himself go, and an uninteresting and non-artistic man took his place.

Just as there was a right and wrong about the smallest details of the church service, just as these details engaged my mother's full moral attention, so did the rigid sticking to society's rules, as exigent as the law of the land. I have said that my mother played the social game, but it seems to me now that her psyche was geared to success or failure, that she was vindicated in a deep personal sense if she was invited to the White House and humiliated if she was *not* invited to something she considered a test of her social standing. During the war, a garden party was held at the British Embassy to honor the Queen of England, and became the kind of event that provokes intrigues, family quarrels, the kindling of furious social ambitions. Despite her efforts, my mother had not been invited, but worse still, her niece, who was married to the third son of a duke, had been, and the fortunate couple was staying in our house. The day of the garden party it rained so persistently that the ladies' big hats collapsed and the collars of the gentlemen's morning coats turned green. Our bedraggled cousins appeared at dinner

and as they told about the disaster of the party we all began to laugh, helpless releasing laughter, and I remember my mother laughing until tears rolled from her eyes. It was over, this terrible test, and perhaps at that moment of relief she saw how little it mattered.

I have staked out in my mind an area like a safety spot where my mother felt unthreatened, for I see now that every day had its threats, that if we seemed to be walking across a mined field it was because our mother had this feeling herself. I see the safety spots in their innocence and isolation: my mother opening her tea basket in the compartment of a European train, heating water over a can of Sterno, handing us enamel cups of weak tea and Klim (the powdered milk of that time, whose mirror name delighted me) and Petits Beurres. I see her outdistancing us all with her loping tourist gait, like a Tennessee walking-horse, and, white-faced, sitting on a broken column at Hadrian's Villa, overcome by the Italian sun. I can feel her confiding arm in mine during the last trip we took together (during which I puzzled her by behaving like a sulky child) and the softness of her hand which so irritated me by gently stroking mine. In her mind, it seemed to me, I had been changed into my father with his depressions and endless arguments, but with his power to protect her. In *my* mind I was the unmarried daughter whose duty was seen as that of taking care of her mother, and the fact that I was compelled to fill this unwelcome role infuriated me. But by then, when she was in her seventies, my mother was an angel of patience, and whatever differences we had were invariably my fault. They came from my feeling that we belonged to different species and that I was yoked to my so-different mother by an obligation I could not accept.

Could we, by a kind of consciousness-raising, have reduced all those threats my mother felt? I am still convinced that I could not have told her any of my secrets (my sister, to whom I have told them, disagrees. "Mother knew more about you than you think," she says but has no evidence to prove it), that she could never have understood my love for women, that, just as she had refused to speak to her oldest sister for twenty years because her sense of justice was outraged in a quarrel over their mother's will, so she would have refused to speak to me and would have read me out of the family circle as well. Hadn't she had her first stroke at her club, watching McCarthy on television, the man who was abominable to her not only because he was a demagogue but because it was rumored that there was a homosexual relationship between him and Roy Cohn? To me, the convulsions my poor mother had then were the outward sign of her loathing, and I was glad I'd kept my secret tightly locked away. And yet, there are Miss Walker's words, "Your mother was clairvoyant," and my sister's insistence that I could

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have talked to our mother and that she would have understood. Even now, my heart begins to thump with the old fear and sickness that came over me at the very thought of talking, that made it impossible to talk to my twin sister until recently, the old fear provoked by my mother's grimness, by an alarming sideways twitch of her set mouth that made us all tremble. I think of my lesbian friends with mothers who are still alive, who live near their mothers at their own risk, who spend themselves in a futile effort to placate them, consenting to hypocritical silence and coming to believe in the necessity, imposed by their mothers, of lying low and pretending to be invisible. I know mothers who have sent their daughters to psychiatrists, mothers who denounce their daughters behind their backs, mothers who take the fact of having a lesbian daughter as an excuse to feel martyred. Which one of these stereotypes would my mother have chosen, she who cared with her whole soul about society's rules?

Too often, it is the mother who makes the rules and the daughter who cares about her who compromises, and in so doing, permits her mother to become a tyrant. A veritable snake pit of taboos prevents the mother of a lesbian daughter from loving her with any constancy. One might expect that because mothers naturally love their daughters the way women love each other — with passionate tenderness — this would help them to understand love between women. On the contrary, every woman is seen as a threat to this love, which, since it is "virtuous," is prevented by a taboo from ever becoming incestuous. The mother of a lesbian stands between her daughter and her daughter's lovers like a dragon; it is as though she were snarling, "Keep away from my property!" for she, the mother, is the only woman a daughter may legitimately love. Unfortunately Freud was too busy with the Oedipus complex and too baffled by the psychology of women (who, for some strange reason, keep rebelling against their conventional role) to go into this other

complex to which no one has yet given a name. No doubt, Sappho had a mother who was anxious about Sappho's women lovers, and if her name had survived, the complex could be named for her. No doubt, this anonymous mother was glad that Sappho had men lovers, too, just as a contemporary mother of a married lesbian daughter swallows her aversion to the idea of women lovers as long as her daughter is "faithful" to her husband. Since she has been fashioned by the patriarchal society we live in, her first reaction to her daughter's marriage is delight (she need no longer be ashamed of her); if her daughter continues to have lesbian attachments which aren't too visible, the mother prefers to think of them as adventures in which love plays no part.

How strange it is that the purest element of a relationship between women is seen as the most threatening, the love that binds them together; and yet it isn't strange, for it is this love which excludes the mother. The nameless complex which makes mothers love and hate their lesbian daughters simultaneously can never, like the Oedipus and Jocasta complexes, be said to be resolved, for society never sanctions lesbian love as it does heterosexual love. When a son or a daughter marries, the mother's bond with her son or her daughter is dissolved in the ceremony of marriage, and this official sanction helps her to bear the pain. Since she had been taught to accept the idea that a husband or wife takes priority over a mother, she must at least make an effort to play second fiddle. But a daughter's love for another woman is condemned by society, and a mother simply cannot believe that her daughter loves another woman more than she loves her own mother.

One sees the mothers of lesbians making frantic efforts to win back their daughters: by bribing them, by making them feel guilty, by placing themselves bodily between the lovers in an act of non-violent resistance by living in the same house with them, and this is the worst punishment that a lesbian couple has to endure. I have observed this and seen the hate it spawned between the mother and the daughter's friend, have seen the daughter wrap herself in a protective silence that made communication and honesty impossible, a cloak she assumed like the Emperor's clothes (if something isn't talked about it doesn't exist); I've suffered from the mealy-mouthed atmosphere of respectability in which it is not permitted to show any signs of affection, to hold hands, to touch the person one loves in front of the dragon-mother, the pretense of the mother that she is fond of the daughter's friend whom she wishes dead, the mother always there as a super-spy who gives you the impression even in the night of keeping her ears cocked for telltale sounds. It is an infernal drama, quietly playing itself out below the surface of politeness and compromise and leading me to an uncompromising conclusion: that lesbian daughters should keep a

safe distance between themselves and their mothers and should not harbour the illusion that they can share their lives even if they seem to love each other. And I will continue to doubt that I could have talked with my mother or that any good would have come of it. My sister, married, with four children, her life a reflection in some ways of our mother's, could of course talk to her, could feel that anything she said would be understood. But I am thankful that I lived those last years of her life in our dishonest shadowland and am convinced that its air was the only air she could breathe. It was not only to protect myself but to protect her from the killing force of the word, or words: *homosexuality, lesbian*, that could not be said or attached to a person without triggering a sort of moral madness.

There is a beautiful episode in *Through the Looking Glass*, a little parable about the power of words to change love into fear. Alice finds herself in the wood "where things have no names" and meets a fawn, who shows no fright, for he cannot remember what he is. "So they walked together through the wood, Alice with her arms clasped lovingly round the soft neck of the Fawn, till they came out into another open field, and here the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. 'I'm a Fawn!' it cried out in a voice of delight. 'And, dear me! you're a human child!' A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed." People of my mother's generation were armed in their minds, the triggers cocked to go off, against certain words, and how could she possibly have endured the naming of her daughter with a word she could not say herself? My mother and I, like Alice and the Fawn, could only be friends in a wood "where things have no names."

Roo Borson:

Five Poems

Labor

The streetcleaning machine chugs around a corner,
the asphalt in its wake black and wet.
The repair crew's been up since five;
this is the first break of the day.
The men lean against the big silent machines
sipping coffee from the take-out,
their yellow hard-hats overturned on the ground.
Little puffs of steam whisk away on the breeze.
Their strong hands wrap around the paper cups,
fingers crooked from handling so many tools,
from lying upside-down under cars,
from crawling into the ducts of houses,
from breaking up asphalt.
Only the young one in the plaid shirt
has smooth hands. He was hired last week
but already he knows how to whistle at a woman.
Soon he'll be a man.
Time to get back on the job —
there's nothing to whistle at this early in the morning anyway,
nothing walking down the street.

Farther along the street in the donut shop window:
rows of empty metal trays, and toward the back
a young woman dipping donuts in a vat
of chocolate, turning them quickly to dry on racks.
She doesn't even stop to lick her fingers.

The sun edges around buildings, spilling crates of shadow.
Daylight's better than the night. The far stars
are deceptive, like the diamond rings in their black velvet cases,
but the jewelry store window is bare now,
as if everything had been stolen.
At midday the shop girls will stop by on their lunch break
and stand at the glass trying to decide
which one they'd choose if they had the chance.

The corner coffee shop opens at seven,
but nobody comes in till later, eight or so.
Only the workmen, but they don't come to sit.
They send one of the crew in to pick up the coffee.
The woman wipes her hands down her apron,
lights a cigarette. In the back her husband's still snoozing.
He said they'd buy a bigger place some day, but that
was ages ago, when they got married.
When you're young you'll say anything.

Back at the repair site they've started up the jackhammer.
It'll wake everybody up. The sound carries all down the street.
The young woman goes to the door to unlock the donut shop
and the day officially begins. At the coffee shop
the woman blows out a sight of smoke;
in awhile her husband will be awake.
The workmen are down in the ditch.
They don't look up
as sunlight crawls over the ragged edge of asphalt,
blazes on the dirt and warms their backs.
The first of the office workers have started filing down the
sidewalk,
surprised that they're digging up the street again,
that so much labor's needed under there.

One Way Or Another

Most people move around from job to job.
They'd rather get paid for nothing.
Between times they sidle down the streets
stoned on anything. It's the slow change of lighting
that turns afternoon to evening.
The young men stand around on the curb drinking beer,
muscles ruddy in the sunset light, careless
of cops cruising past, their women
hanging on their arms laughing
one notch too loudly as if deep down
they understood themselves.
These women, they used to be the wild ones,
they let themselves get passed around.
The ones who got pregnant
just disappeared.

The men will disappear too, one way or another.
But for now they stand there, cocky, with their arms crossed
and women hanging on them as if someday
they'd be millionaires. There are always
enough of them to line those streets,
drinking while the cool breezes come out of hiding,
bringing things back, making them remember
what they are, that they've got nothing, but that's more
than anyone likes to think about.
So somebody turns on a radio.
They lean back and let their bodies float
off a bit, just to lighten the load.
It takes only a few notes
to make a melody, the rest
is empty space. It's the time spent waiting
between jobs, between anything
and the next. It takes only a few notes
but you have to remember
or it's lost.
You have to to remember.

Sixteen

All night she's lain listening to the rain
dropping like small change into puddles.
Trying to lie still beside the boy.

It's cold outside, grey and dripping from the eaves.
Each step seems to lift her
a foot off the ground from lack of sleep.
The houses — soaked through and strangely bright.
A cat prances up sideways
then scoots off through the bushes
deep in its own wildness.

The high school where they both go:
the fence pulled shut with a chain.
She can smell the hamburger places:
heat, grease, fresh donuts.
A smell vaguely like fog, vaguely like coffee.
The traffic lights go from gold to red to green
and back again.

The boy's bed was quiet, a damp heat under the blankets.
The room in the backyard over the garage,
his own world. A drunken mother
asleep in the big house.

She only stayed because he told her to. Or because
it's different from being alone. But while he slept
she couldn't move. As she walks
there's something she's not telling herself.
She's not allowing the words to form.

She's seen it. Like two animals.
The tomcat bites the scruff
of the female's neck so she can't get away,
you can hear it hurting her and still she wants it.
The girl doesn't want it though. It's not that
she wants. She wants the part he keeps to himself,
what's back of those eyes.

Endurance

You're sitting there drinking.
Big windows overlook the bay,
little chinks of light opening and closing
on the water, too quick to catch hold of.
It's one of the signs — a wallet stuffed full
with not just money but cards, things
with your name on them, an address.
One of the signs
that things are half over.
All around the room the sunset
glows in people's drinks; it lights up yours too.
Looking out at the bay
you can sit and smoke,
sort things out alone.
In the corner a woman's hair
shivers with chance sunlight as she laughs;
the man she's with — his eyes
keep flicking down to her sweater.
When people first meet
they smile alot, testing.
But you have to meet first.
So things are half over, what of it?
Tiny rainbows on the walls
where the sun splits through the drinks.
On the bay the lights open and close,
too quick to catch.
It's like that, isn't it.
Everyone will go their way. Eventually
you'll go yours too,
step again over the threshold
of a wrong house, a mistaken address.
Then the meal eaten, hardly speaking.
Those kids — how could they ever have come from
nothing, from two bodies. Now things are half over
and it's like it never happened. And later
lying all night in the darkness
beside the real distance, a distance
like the long open ocean past San Francisco Bay
that you'd gladly dive in and swim except you know
it goes on forever, beyond
the endurance of the body.

Morning Glories

Between night and morning the freshened airy streets lie quiet. All night the spasms of rain and thunder and the calm that follows. What is it the summer will finally give birth to? At this hour I walk invisibly, protected and alone, following a faint smell of angel that precedes me through the streets. And here before your darkened house: one starry light left on to say you will return this time, that you are only far away in a city I have not seen.

The sun is slow this morning and has not yet found me. Each day I wait for it in a different place. Today I've climbed to your back porch where the morning glory vines dangle dripping wires, like downed phone lines, in the exaggerated quiet after a storm. The flowers are sleeping, bright and twisted, hooked through the matted vine, each a day of summer still to come. But yesterday's are puckered, tobacco-coloured, as if life had passed through them too quickly, barely rippling the surface.

The first sun slants off the darkness of the rooves. A warmth that tingles, like a million tiny cuts. All night I've not been touched. At the edges of my eyes the morning glories conspire to open bit by bit where I can't catch them. Like children, taunting me for having limits. Until the day lies plain and brilliant, containing no surprises except these morning glories, like blue summer thunder.

I can no longer account for the dark heart-shaped leaves that hang between us, wherever we are now, for you have caught me stealing time with your morning glories. It has always been that when we looked at one another we saw clearly for a moment some thing that should be passed down among brothers, an inheritance. But we are awkward with our differences — man, woman, these small things. Standing at the screen door, your hands are like pale night moths caught in the net. You were only as far away as sleep, a sleep you have walked out of as from a city whose ruin I have not witnessed. I understand now, that you cannot come out to me, to all of this, until I have made myself real again by speaking.

Suburdom

Karen Frazier

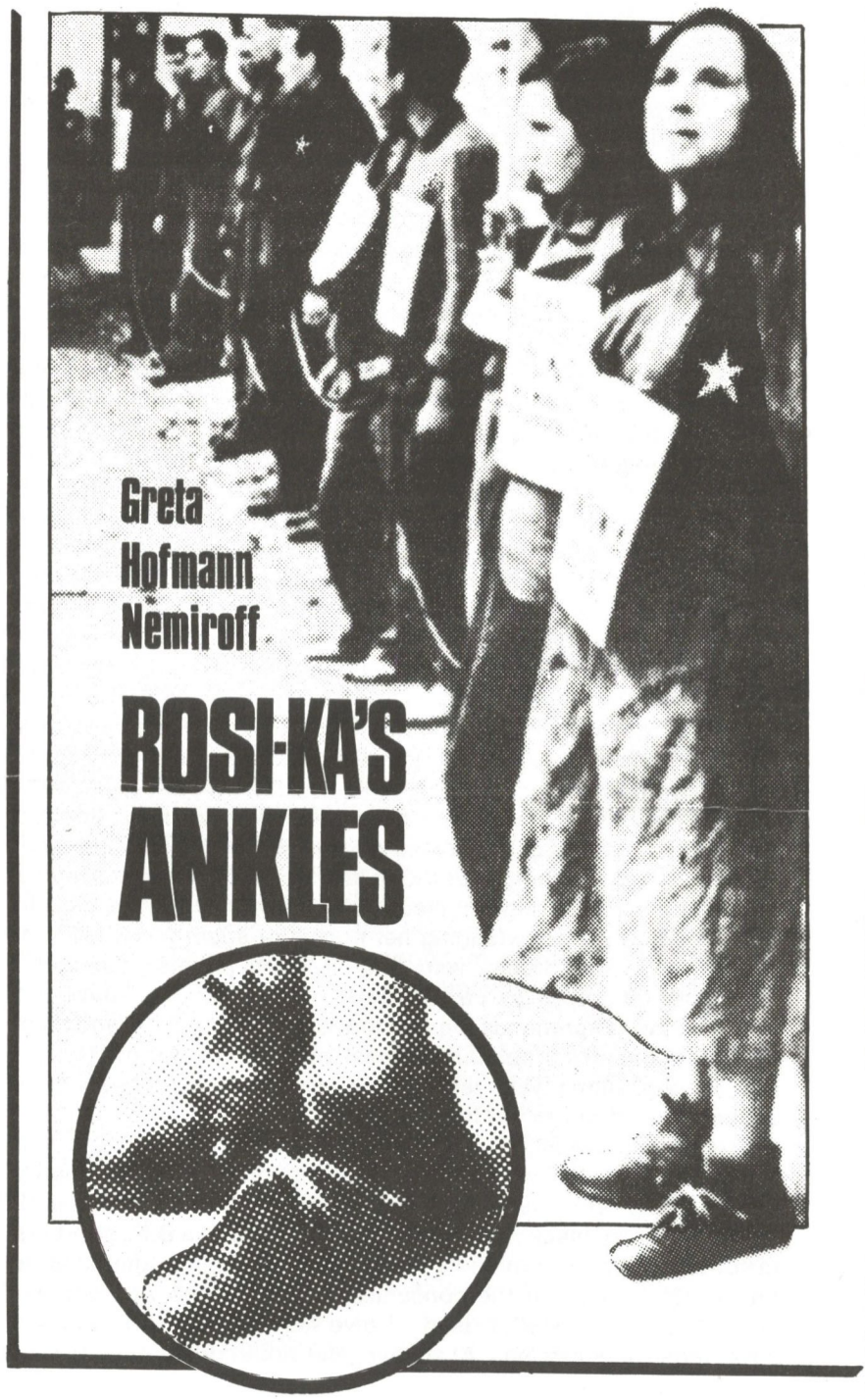
Is this it? Is this it?
winterlessness and children
and these people
reaching pleased as leaves
for the suburban summer,
smug if too-much with sun,
the humidity
a wet breath at every neck

I have come under the umbrella:
coupledom and comfort,
as if I believed it was this
or nothing,
honesty living at the periphery
like a stranger at Christmas'
window

The lawn is proud and punctual
as a number,
trimmed and scented as a man's
workday face

And yet, occasionally,
in the steaming retreat of summer
rains,
the old issues still
come clean,
like bones or teeth—

the pulse always soft,
almost audible,
the vague heart of boredom
blooming like blood
in the cold
under the careful covers
where
sh-sh-sh
wanting is making something
for nothing



Rosi-ka. Rosie. And now Rose. Prone on the custom-made chaise-longue, Rose extends first one leg and then the other; her toes are pointed like a ballerina's. Bathed in the sunlight and deeply tanned, smoothly depilitated, massaged with expensive creams, they look solid but less formidable than usual. She examines her ankles carefully, critically... one by one. As from a great distance, she hears two men conversing, their ice-cubes tinkling in high-ball glasses. Sounds of summer afternoons in the country. The two men, though, are not really far away; right beside her in fact, on the flagstone terrace. Determinedly she ignores their voices. This examination of her ankles demands full attention; over the three decades of her womanhood, this perusal has turned into a ritual. She stretches each leg up high and lets her eyes travel down the firm, brown thighs to the knees, then stop for a moment mid-calf where all the clumsiness begins: where each leg should begin a graceful, down-ward curve to a slender ankle, it simply drops to form a terminal right angle to her foot. Those ankles, dark and smooth, are formed of hard, ungiving substance, neither muscle nor bone, which even the years of nursing training have not helped her to identify or describe. Always, though, she has hated them... blamed these ankles as the palpable emblem of her every defect.

It has, it seems to her now, always been so; she could never pass a plate glass window, a mirror, or even a puddle without that furtive glance, that involuntary tightening of the calf to see if she could "pass" or "get away with it." In the fifties (Rosie in those days) as a nursing student, she would ignore the warning of her instructors and hurry about in cruel stiletto heels which jerked her legs downward with a twist; that way her calves, permanently tensed, knotted and bulged out, made her ankles appear slimmer by comparison. While in reality the height of those heels caused her to move in a suggestive step... a slight mince, really... she was always certain that those men acknowledging her noisily or silently in corridors, from doorways and trucks, were in their hearts privately commenting on her fat ankles with a "too bad" or "if only." She knew, and now too she comprehends the fact that eyes, lips, breasts and hips, those touchstones of feminine appeal, mean nothing if not terminated in long, slim, stylish legs. Those ankles, too solid flesh, have become the "if only's" of her life.

After the holocaust, she turned up in a Displaced Persons' camp in Frankfurt am Main via a series of box-cars originating in Hungary and stopping off at Auschwitz. Rosi-ka, she was then, with shoulder-length frizzy black hair, the shabby cast-offs of a D.P., numbers tattooed on her forearm and a language irreparably fragmented by the polyglot jungle of the concentration camp. She was popular among young G.I.'s who used to give her real silk stockings to cover those ungainly legs. At sixteen, she would ride around in U.S.

army jeeps, hoping to fill the void left by all that deprivation, but remain at a distance from the heat of ebullience released by small town America. There were also the exhausted, the cynical young men, alumni of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Budapest sewers, Theresienstadt perhaps, who would distractedly try to make love to her. Remotely and without comment, they stroked her legs. Their attentions caused her less anguish than any before or since those days. She was always aware that their canceled heads and hearts were really immersed in mysterious deals: the buying and reselling of jewelry and land, procuring visas and above all... keeping the options wide open. In the rush and relief of the liberation, it was inappropriate to consider beauty, hope for prettiness. She felt guilty then at the pettiness of her concerns when millions had died and even her own father had disappeared never to return. Now, lying on a flagstone terrace on the next continent, Rose wonders again about those enthusiastic young Americans, the weary and automatically gallant Europeans; what did they really think about her glaring imperfections? Surely they had been repelled by those graceless legs?

She allows herself to look over at the two men. Bob, her husband, is entertaining Mr. Appleby, a business connection from Vancouver who is caught in Montréal on Labour Day weekend. Bob likes inviting business acquaintances out to the country; such gestures can be interpreted in those circles as magnanimous, if tax-deductable, indications of good business relations. The two men are oblivious of her absence from them. Words surface in the breeze coming off the fields... "sales volume... profit... margin... in-put... feedback..." It is a recitative she knows well, although she is unconvinced about its importance on a summer day. Yet those words and phrases, she understands, form a litany, a ceremony of validation. Even on a late summer afternoon on a holiday weekend in which hundreds of North Americans will die on the highways, there is order in the men's world. Control is being asserted; money made. "Shop talk," Bob calls it tolerantly in reference to himself and irritably when she speaks too much of her nursing.

Bob Reilly, with his myriad cousins, the Mulally's and the Malloy's. Often she finds herself gazing at him, trying to find a point of convergence or recognition. She looks over at him now: a patterned shirt hangs out of his over-sized khaki shorts; there are substantial sandals on the huge feet planted, or perhaps rooted, in the ground. His face shines reddish in the light; net-works of fine, red, veins are beginning to surface on his nose. "What has happened to us all?" she thinks once again. "Why have we grown so ugly?" It wasn't always like this; of this she is certain. A whirlwind romance, they called it then, she and Bob. For his sake she had changed her name from Rosie to Rose; Rosi-ka was out of the ques-

tion. Wined and dined, they used to dance in salmon leatherette cocktail lounges where the food was indifferent and over-priced. Spacious lounges furnished in the then avant-garde free-form provided them with small orchestras dependent on rhythms marked by bored maraca players. In this habitat of expensive intimacy, slightly dulled by strong drinks, she never did think to find out how he viewed her ankles. Sometimes, though, he would burst out at her treacherously high heels in total exasperation:

"Jesus Christ, Rose," he would explode, reddening even then as she twisted or tripped on a heel, "one of these days you're going to break your neck on those crazy shoes." But he has never commented precisely on her ankles, and she still doesn't know if he cares.

Those early years in Montréal he was all she'd ever wanted, (or it seemed to her then) since that morning when the town-Jews had been gathered on the square opposite the railway station. She was there with her mother, her aunt, and her four grandparents; her father had disappeared months before. Tall, blond and ruddy-faced with a strong blue gaze, Bob would certainly take care of her forever. "Cherry pink and apple blossom white," the muted music droned with its discreet percussion backing in those years. They used to dance close, her head against his chest, his breath warm on the top of her head. Da-da-dum-di-da-di-da-da-dum. Dancing a four-sided step around an invisible box, she used to feel totally desirable. Sometimes, too, they rode like the gentry on rented horses in autumn forests, the air crisp as apples; her riding boots were laced tight to give that extra bit of shape to the leg.

Twenty years later, with three grown sons who tend to ignore her, she can only look back at those days of courtship as a hiatus seen in a brief flash of light down a long, dark tunnel. She might find herself, for instance, here on the terrace overlooking the shimmering turquoise swimming pool one level below in its nest of imported mosaic set in the rolling lawn. Not even this pool in its fastidiously chosen tiles can seduce her anymore. The long view of the further fields with their story-book horses grazing under umbrella elms can be instantly replaced by a scarcely remembered moment of waiting ...the train depot in an obscure Hungarian village near Pécs. "Don't cry," her grandfather the Rabbi warned her; he did not have to say more. She knew her duty, had learned it: she was to provide an example to the faithful and shame to the goyim.

"What has happened to us all," she inquires of herself in the plastic dome of the hair-dryer, while a discreet henna embraces and camouflages her greying head. "We have grown ugly," she whispers to herself in the sanctuary of the woman's section at the synagogue where each Yom Kippur she creeps to atone for surviving. Anything can impel these thoughts: the woman sweating in mink beside her, the jangle of a charm bracelet blithely interrupting

It all falls into place: they are just an exhibit of the urbane landscape covering North America in fine weather like a benevolent blight.

a prayer. Her grandfather's memory is almost obliterated by Irish great-grandsons who have never heard the word "Kaddish." "Set an example," he said in that depot near Pécs; even now she can't remember if it was courage or despair in his voice. But she remembers her own fear; it will never leave her and is vibrant even on this terrace furnished with nationally advertised products and bordered with frilled petunias. "How transient it all is..." she thinks.

"We have grown ugly," she once observed to Bob on a winter evening. The words fell from her mouth when she came across him, overweight and plum-faced, asleep in his vibrating-reclining-arm-chair, high-ball still upright in his hand, and the television a riot of colour.

"What the Hell are you talking about now?" he shouted, but calmed as he straightened his chair to "Sit" and continued. "You're still a good-looking woman, Rose, if that's what you want to know. God, I'd let you know if you were slipping, you can count on that. I can't stand women who let themselves go and you know it. You look the same as when I met you... more or less, anyway... but this depression and complaining, it really gets me down. God knows you've only got things to be thankful for, I mean is there anything lacking? Other women would give their eye teeth for what you have. I don't think I'll ever understand you."

And he never will and can't, she thinks in a moment of clarity that Sunday before Labour Day, overlooking the pool. "Thoroughbred, sure they cost, but it's worth it... pays to buy quality in the end." Bob's voice rises with pride: quality is his conviction and he makes sure he knows which brand is the best in everything. The men turn their heads to watch one of the horses trot slowly to the other side of the meadow. "Oh the boys," she hears him respond to a murmur from Appleby, "Hell, I don't know where they are right now. You know what they're like at this age... no questions asked, no answers given. Everyone has a right to a few wild oats, I always say, so 'live and let live' is my motto, but their mother, now, she worries enough for the two of us." He laughs his public chuckle, "mothers will always be mothers, instinct I guess."

Rose looks down as if from a distant free-fall; she sees the three of them so decorously arranged on this terrace and in a moment of lucidity it all falls into place: they are just an example, an exhibit of

the urbane landscape covering North America in fine weather like a benevolent blight. Drinks are served overlooking the pool on fine afternoons and good weather predicted for tomorrow, making it a perfect holiday weekend; gay striped awnings on the windows, a portable red-wood bar, and bright cushions tossed with calculated abandon everywhere.

"I'm just a typical Jewish mother," she says. She has aimed for levity, but is deafened by a surprised pause as Appleby turns his entire body to survey her with interest. Of course, she realizes, he doesn't know; behind him she catches sight of Bob's face smothering irritation with the rosy pillow of a fat man's guaranteed jollity. ("Christ," he said to her when he entered this business, "it's not that I have anything against Jews, you know that, I mean I married you didn't I, but let's play that part down for the business side of things. You know who runs this country and it sure as Hell isn't the Irish either." A self-made man knows about those things.)

"That's a lovely bathing-suit," Appleby remarks, leaning over the arm of his chair. "I was just thinking to myself what a fine couple you make," and his voice lowers a shade. "Mrs. Appleby passed on two years ago... cancer, it was. I think you met her at the house once, didn't you Bob? Too bad you both couldn't have met her."

"What a meal that was, Jim, how could I forget? She was a really fine hostess, and your house... still have it?"

"Well, yes, I like the view and the garden. I'm a bit of a gardening nut, you know, but it gets kind of lonely up there in the big house. The kids are all over the place these days, you know what it's like. I don't think they'll ever come back. I'm seriously thinking of giving it up and moving into an efficiency apartment."

"Have you thought of buying a small apartment building and living in it? It's the best investment you can make for retirement with the market the way it is. Can't beat real-estate for security." Bob, she can see this, is ready to talk about his real-estate interests which have appreciated measurably over the years. Perhaps Appleby senses her imminent withdrawal because he leans confidentially towards her.

"It was really fine of you to have me out here, Mrs. Reilly, it can be lonely in hotels on holiday weekends. I was just telling Bob before that an attractive woman like you is a real asset to him. If there's anything I can't stand it's a woman letting herself go." He tips the cubes in his rye and water towards him and away in widening circles.

"I take exercise classes to keep the tummy flat, but it's the ankles that spoil everything. Nothing will improve them." Rose laughs knowingly. "I'm sure you've already noticed them." Appleby looks uncomprehendingly at her ankles and smiles vaguely at the garrulity unleashed by his blithe remarks. It is the indifference of

his glance which provokes Rose further, "I can't do a thing about them; it's funny, they're my weakest spot but they saved my life."

"Oh God," Bob breathes; he knows the tone, he knows the story. He's as generous as the next guy, but why drag Appleby... for Chrissake... into this? It's not every guy marries a woman with numbers on her arm, but that's not enough. Nothing, not one goddamn thing is ever enough. "Say, did you notice that sunset?" He is aware of his own voice, unnaturally cheery and loud.

"Lovely country out here," agrees Appleby, the business connection, the widower from Vancouver.

Rosi-ka pauses for a moment and reflects on her husband's observation. He's acting like he telephoned out for it like a pizza all-dressed, she thinks but presses on; it is getting late. "Let me tell you about how it happened. We Hungarians were the last to be taken by Hitler. It was in 1944 and I was just a skinny kid. You look surprised, Mr. Appleby, but I know you must have been wondering about the numbers on my arm. Don't be embarrassed, they're no secret, especially with a bathing suit on." She shrugs and laughs. "You won't believe this but those numbers have never bothered me as much as my fat ankles have. To get back to the story... we were on a train for days in terrible heat. My mother, my aunt and my four grandparents. My grandfather was the rabbi of our small town and his entire congregation followed him to Auschwitz. Oh, they had no choice, none of us did, and half were dead by the time we arrived at the camp. I don't know why my family survived it."

"Rose, there's a time and a place, eh?" Bob looks out over his terrain with slitted eyes and casts an apologetic look at his guest. "It's been over thirty years... but not for her," he explains.

"When we got off at the camp, they grouped us on the railway platform." Rosi-ka hurries now before she is permanently cut off. "There was a prisoner, a middle-aged man unloading the bodies from the train. He noticed my mother and me, who knows why, and he came to question us, first in Polish, then Czech until at last they could talk together only in German. 'How old is your child?' he asked her. 'Thirteen,' she answered. 'No she isn't,' he said. 'If you want her to live, she's eighteen. Under eighteen, it's the ovens. She'll go up in smoke.' He pointed to the huge cloud of smoke which was to hover constantly over the camp. 'But who'll believe me, look at her all bones, she isn't even a woman yet.' Mother was terrified, I could hear it in her voice. He took a second look at me. 'Look at her legs,' he said, 'they're nice and heavy... she can do a good day's work with them to hold her up... such thick ankles. I tell you this only to help, believe me, I could get into trouble for talking to you. It's very easy to die here.' He was about to move on when he stopped and looked around. The guards were further down the platform. 'Those old people,' he asked, 'who are they?' 'My parents and in-laws.' 'Forget

them,' he ordered, 'move over to the other side of the platform or you'll die with them. They don't have a chance. Fast, the guards are already beginning to separate the weak from the strong.' Without thought, we did as he told us; my aunt, who had looked after her parents in life, stayed with them to die, but we moved away. The prisoner was right; we could see that. We never saw them again and we never said goodbye to them either."

Appleby clears his throat and tries to keep from staring at the numbers on her arm; he is surprised that he hadn't noticed them before she mentioned their existence. Poor buggers. He was in the service but never saw any of that, never looked for it either. "Well," his voice is tentative, "you're here now and that's all that counts in the end."

"Wait, I haven't finished, though. You see the strange part of it is that even there on the platform with death all around me and everything I loved being taken away, I could still feel wounded vanity. My adolescent pride was hurt because I had been told that my legs were fat. It stung me even then."

"Don't put them down, Rose, they saved your life." This is a new role for Appleby... far from the Caledonian Curling Club, his usual harbour. He has read and heard about these things, but has never yet met a victim. He's never talked to a real victim before and wants to succeed at it.

"Oh yes, my ankles saved me. I could put in a good day," her voice is undisguised in its bitterness now. "My mother and I lived out the rest of the war working in an armaments factory until liberation. We'd hear the Allied bombers flying over us and know we were the target. We wanted the allies to win but to spare our factory. Let them win elsewhere, we would pray. Even then at such times one is selfish... six million of us had died and I was unwilling to risk my life." She bitterly records the well-clipped hedges, the trim lawns, in the movement of her glance.

The two men clink their ice-cubes and look down at the flagstones. Rosi-ka looks from one to the other. What-do-I-want-from-them-we-have-grown-very-ugly, repeats itself in her mind. This is her ongoing monologue, these days. In the early years with Bob, she used to wake up screaming in the night. He would hold her close and comfort her with the litany of their assets: times had changed, they had lovely children, friends, a fine home, each other. Over the past few years he has become, as it were, immune to her cries; he snores right through her screams, turning over with his back to her. But she still wakes up bolt upright in bed, shivering in the coldness of the air, the frigid void of her vision. She doesn't usually remember the details of her dreams as much as their feeling, that of an abyss viewed at close-up range.

Bob gets up slowly. She knows he is going over to the bar to get

the whisky. It is time to refresh the waning drinks. On his way, he bends heavily to snap the flower off a dying petunia. As he turns toward her with the bottle, she lays her hand flat over the top of her empty glass.

"Look!" They both turn to follow Appleby's pointed finger.

Far down the lawn in the long grass bordering the vegetable garden, they can make out a slight movement. Then they notice the sleek head of the ground-hog who has been systematically dismantling their tender vegetables. Reared up on fat solid haunches, he moves his head expectantly around. Bob has picked up the rifle he keeps leaning against the side of the house.

"Been waiting for this moment," he explains, squinting down the barrel. "Bugger's been at the garden all summer, impossible to get rid of him. Rose's been at me not to kill him. Hell only knows, I've tried to spare him, but you plug one hole and he just tunnels another one."

Oblivious, the smooth head sniffs the air, seeming to savour its freshness. A sharp crack fractures the evening's stillness; a clumsy tumble into the long grass.

"Perfect shot! Right between the eyes," Appleby congratulates.

Numbly, Rosi-ka watches them, her husband Bob Reilly and his guest, Mr. Appleby from Vancouver. At a leisurely pace they amble down the lawn with the two family dogs yelping in front of them. They are conversing and although she can't make out the words, she knows their substance: guns... rifles... rifle clubs... deer in the fall... the outdoors nothing like it... health...

"We are not what we once were," she thinks aloud only to realize immediately that this is untrue. On the contrary, nothing has ever changed; there are no surprises. Without getting up, she begins gathering the afternoon's debris: a filled ash-tray and half-empty package of cigarettes, her empty glass. Her eyes graze her ankles. Stretched out on the chaise-longue, smooth and dark in the evening light, they do not look unattractive. She knows though that in them must repose her every hope... her every failure. An unexplored shadow briefly crosses her mind at these thoughts and she feels heat gathering behind her eyes. It is Bob's voice that stops her from crying this evening. Stentorian over rolling lawns and above the muted whisperings of an invisible sprinkler system, he calls:

"Rose, how about supper? It's getting late."

They have drunk a great deal today, she realizes as she moves about. That's it: they drink too much. She once read an article in a reputable magazine that says just this: there is a disease called "hidden alcoholism" which plagues the executive classes in America. She has a headache, she notices. Nonetheless, a bit unsteadily with her ankles turning in on the cruel platform shoes which are current fashion, she makes her way into the kitchen.

Erin Mouré:
Three Poems

Lenore

Here is the woman hurt all her life
by money, walking away
from it walking away from her, leaving the children behind
with her in the house she bought from Rose
in 1958,
how she took in ironing 8 hours a day & fought
for the pay from that.
Next week, next week, was all she heard.
She pegs the air with her cigarette & tells of
borrowing 5 dollars from Mike at the Legion
just to feed her girls.
& the house not paid off yet, 22 years later.
Still she thinks everyone has money but her.
Rose has money, Bob has money, this & that one
fade into the haze of happy strangers,
alive with money, she thinks

She sees her future self in her mother at Edson,
75 years old & still cleaning hotel-rooms,
getting up at 4am to heat water
for her laundry,
wondering "Is it clean?"
This is Lenore with no money, the future eaten out of her
& the past aching,
a woman once *so elegant*
tethered to house payments & the girls, now grown,
& the aunts who accused her of drinking.

Today her friends anger her; the toughness she's made of
breaks down slowly, & she cries about
money & Rose & her washed-out loneliness
unconquered in more than 20 years, even by the men she held
to relieve the quiet urge of her body
Never thinking of the love she'd need,
never dreaming this far forward,
to her daughters gone from her unpaid swelling,
to this Legion & the breakdown of caring;
where her fears gentle her & she drinks her Scotch,
lost with us in the cold
heart of her family

Tip

for A.W.

"After this nothing else really seems important."

The tractor tipped over, killing the father,
pulling his image out of Andrew.

When the tractor jerked over, it pulled the string
of rose-petals down, the father stopped
& the tractor wheels swam like fish,
the engines purred on & on,
& the image pulled out of Andrew, a history

long as a vein, long as a family,
not Andrew dead but
the working father of him, the man who drove
the tractor

when it tipped, & pulled harsh
the vein out of Andrew.
A place in him strained & missing, his friends
see him & wince,

awed at the hole & the string
pulled from it, pulling the photographs in albums over
blankly,
pulling the tractor back up
& the man thrown from it dead, a body, not his father.

Pull the father back into the photos, flat & more still
than a leaf in no wind.

No wind, pulls Andrew down into the pained space of his father,
into the machine bent like an animal, like
all of us
animals, the rose-petals fallen, Andrew goes on
stubborn, pulling the veins with him,
they tauten & tip what tenderly they hold

What It Is, The Monstrous

What it is, the monstrous
touch of life in us: our surrender

At breakfast
in the airport, a woman breaks slowly away
from her memory
She imagines the husband she will meet upon landing
Cities away,
he is not awake, his heart-tick sleeps
not knowing absence
His need for her rests now, will awaken
later in his body
He will enter the clutter to find her, an airport
where the woman will leave him
Heart shut, shut-up, shuttered, god
damn it

She does not know a reason for anything
She sees the days increase like walls, like properties
of value changing hands
Out of touch
Her breakfast is cold, the janitors clean after her in Toronto
Her memory is the man, his hard need for alcohol
that makes parting vital,
that eats away flesh, the carrion words swept up
Lunge & tatter
Hurt each of us/

SIMMERING

MARGARET ATWOOD

It started in the backyards. At first the men concentrated on heat and smoke, and on dangerous thrusts with long forks. Their wives gave them aprons in railroad stripes, with slogans on the front — *Hot Stuff*, *The Boss* — to spur them on. Then it began to get all mixed up with who should do the dishes, and you can't fall back on paper plates forever, and around that time the wives got tired of making butterscotch brownies and jello salads with grated carrots and baby marshmallows in them and wanted to make money instead, and one thing led to another. The wives said that there were only twenty-four hours in a day; and the men, who in that century were still priding themselves on their rationality, had to agree that this was so.

For a while they worked it out that the men were in charge of the more masculine kinds of food: roasts, chops, steaks, dead chickens and ducks, gizzards, hearts, anything that had obviously been killed, that had visibly bled. The wives did the other things, the glazed parsnips and the prune whip, anything that flowered or fruited or was soft and gooey in the middle. That was all right for about a decade. Everyone praised the men to keep them going, and the wives, sneaking out of the houses in the mornings with their squeaky new briefcases, clutching their bus tickets because the men needed the station wagons to bring home the carcasses, felt they had got away with something.

But time is not static, and the men refused to stay put. They could not be kept isolated in their individual kitchens, kitchens into which the wives were allowed less and less frequently because, the men said, they did not sharpen the knives properly, if at all. The men began to acquire kitchen machines, which they would spend the weekends taking apart and oiling. There were a few accidents

at first, a few lost fingers and ends of noses, but the men soon got the hang of it and branched out into other areas: automatic nutmeg graters, electric gadgets for taking the lids off jars. At cocktail parties they would gather in groups at one end of the room, exchanging private recipes and cooking yarns, tales of soufflés daringly saved at the last minute, pears flambés which had gone out of control and had to be fought to a standstill. Some of these stories had risqué phrases in them, such as *chicken breasts*. Indeed, sexual metaphor was changing: bowls and forks became prominent, and *eggbeater, pressure cooker* and *turkey baster* became words which only the most daring young women, the kind who thought it was a kick to butter their own toast, would venture to pronounce in mixed company. Men who could not cook very well hung about the edges of these groups, afraid to say much, admiring the older and more experienced ones, wishing they could be like them.

Soon after that, the men resigned from their jobs in large numbers so they could spend more time in the kitchen. The magazines said it was a modern trend. The wives were all driven off to work, whether they wanted to or not: someone had to make the money, and of course they did not want their husbands' masculinity to be threatened. A man's status in the community was now displayed by the length of his carving knives, by how many of them he had and how sharp he kept them, and by whether they were plain or ornamented with gold and precious jewels.

Exclusive clubs and secret societies sprang up. Men meeting for the first time would now exchange special handshakes — the Béchamel twist, the chocolate mousse double grip — to show that they had been initiated. It was pointed out to the women, who by this time did not go into the kitchens at all on pain of being thought unfeminine, that *chef* after all means *chief* and that Mixmasters were common but no one had ever heard of a Mixmistress. Psychological articles began to appear in the magazines on the origin of women's kitchen envy and how it could be cured. Amputation of the tip of the tongue was recommended, and, as you know, became a widespread practice in the more advanced nations. If Nature had meant women to cook, it was said, God would have made carving knives round and with holes in them.

This is history. But it is not a history familiar to many people. It exists only in the few archival collections that have not yet been destroyed, and in manuscripts like this one, passed from woman to woman, usually at night, copied out by hand or memorized. It is subversive of me even to write these words. I am doing so, at the risk of my own personal freedom, because now, after so many centuries of stagnation, there are signs that hope and therefore change have once more become possible.

The women in their pinstripe suits, exiled to the living rooms where they dutifully sip the glasses of port brought out to them by the men, used to sit uneasily, silently, listening to the loud bursts of male and somehow derisive laughter from behind the closed kitchen doors. But they have begun whispering to each other. When they are with those they trust, they tell of a time long ago, lost in the fogs of legend, hinted at in packets of letters found in attic trunks and in the cryptic frescoes on abandoned temple walls, when women too were allowed to participate in the ritual which now embodies the deepest religious convictions of our society: the transformation of the consecrated flour into the holy bread. At night they dream, long clandestine dreams, confused and obscured by shadows. They dream of plunging their hands into the earth, which is red as blood and soft, which is milky and warm. They dream that the earth gathers itself under their hands, swells, changes its form, flowers into a thousand shapes, for them too, for them once more. They dream of apples; they dream of the creation of the world; they dream of freedom.

The Individual Hunter

Marilyn Bowering

It happens:
and there is explaining to do
to the man who keeps the Inn.
Clothes are rolled up in the bed
and the bed folded back against the wall.

Tufts of yellow grass point through the snow
on the journey,
a hare bounds away to the hills
and the sun is a haze on a hunter's shoulder:
they vanish together through the blank night wall.

A year of tracking and no meat.
Sleep, try to remember its taste.

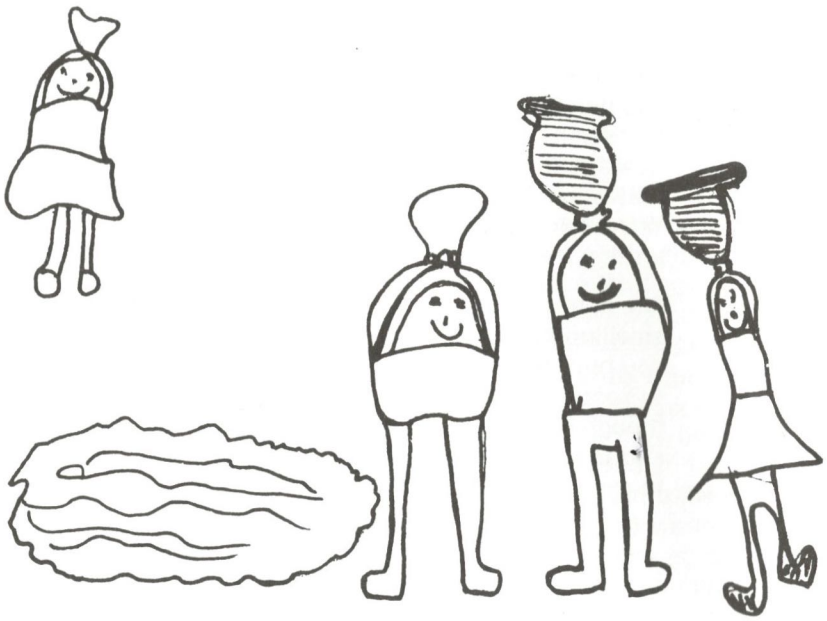
To get what you want
you must be desired by the animal you have frightened.
In its bony skeleton
flow the threads of the scent
that will bring it gnawing.
You are restless as a young rabbit
turning from the one who will mate you.

The hare comes at a slow pace,
smelling its way to your skin.
You have made it up, the empty mammal skull sings
to keep you company,
though it is cool on the snowy hill,
and there is no house or Inn near
to explain this passage of yours.

In India

Elda Concordia
April Marshall

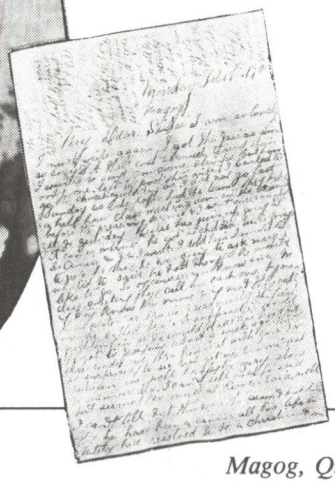
This is how they carry water in India. They put it in a big pot. They put the pot down in the well then they put it over their head. They bring it home. This is the way they carry water. They might have to walk a long way. Water is very heavy. They couldn't carry very much at one time so they would have to make many trips.



I Woke That Morning

Meagan Ward

I woke that morning feeling like a zoukie. I had felt like this before but it was a hitilliant ago. After my job at the faramanial I went down to the nuclitus. When I arrived the doctor gave me a hickadopous test. Luckily for me it turned out to be negative. But the kipadonium test didn't. Now it was for sure that I had sonobonagious. If I was going to live, I would have to follow the limian diet. That meant I had to sleep continuously for two weeks. I went home and fixed myself a viltonious sandwich with heckonbottas and millrocles. I went to sleep. When I was asleep I had a dream about me swimming in a dadaha and this enormous azaramarian came out of the water trying to capture me. And following the azaramarian were two orange sonktoms. These orange sonktoms were vicious. They each had two bovens coming out of their exlontomouses. Just as I was on the verge of being captured a kipadonkous came out of the sky and saved me. Right then I woke up to the sound of a finkal. It was at my door. I realized I had only slept for a quarter of a hitilliant and that I would die because I didn't follow the limian diet...



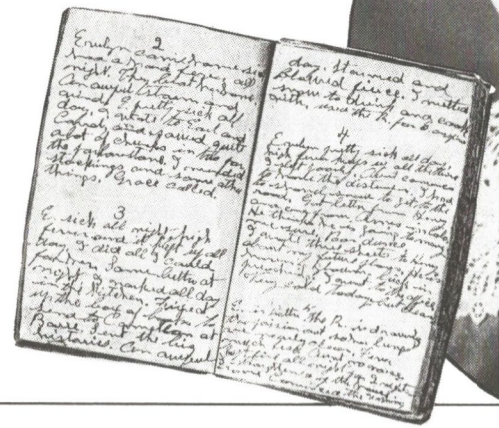
A letter from Clara Oakley Call to her sister

Magog, Québec
March 14, 1909

My precious Sister,

After a week of grief with poor Genie I want to write a few lines but I am going to try to make it brief as Possible, I have not cried so much for years yes 9 years for I could not help it when I heard poor Gene tho he has set his teeth together so much to wait till he could speak with steady voice & not betray his feelings, But oh Lessie if you could have heard him the last thing at night when he went in to kiss her goodnight I shall never forget it while reason holds her sway; She had lain there since Sunday noon, & after I kissed him goodnight & we had gone into our room I heard the door close in the room where she lay open & close 2 bedrooms side by side & a door from ours into that & I soon heard a wail that chilled me thro & then that same baby talk as I so well remembered hearing him talk to her when I was there last, not at this house you know. I dropped on the bed & said whats that? Wilma the hired woman said it is Gene bidding her goodnight & she said, every night & she said I never heard anything like it in my life, but after a little talk to the clay without response he went out I think he thought of me for Wilma said he had always staid some time each night before; I was awful tired but could not go to sleep I was wondering how people

Celesta Oakley Taylor, in the Eastern Townships.



courtesy of Albion Taylor

*can think God would deprive us of our loved ones & give us that agony. He looks & acts just like when I first met him. He is very bald — he has wonderful will power where did he get it I cant help but wonder. He had to think to arrange everything even thought & asked me if I had a black veil. I wish you could see his only blessing Ethel, I never saw such a head of hair in my life auburn & blue eyes no grey or hazel Gene said he wished they might be blue, She is the most perfect reproduction I ever saw of Annie. All Honsinger Well they seem to be a real smart well bred family & up to date in everything. I met a lot of them & they were so friendly & nice to me for I am sure they all think so much of Gene. (...) He is going to advertise for a man & wife Ethel will talk & twist her mouth to crow at Gene & laugh, I never saw a brighter baby. Wilma says it is a wonder for 6 weeks old It weighed 8 1/4 at birth but has only gained 1 lb, eats 3/4 milk as Gene fixes it & never cries only when waiting too long for bottle then she curls up her lip so grieved He sent to Sears & Roebuck & got 6 dollars worth of baby clothes & Annie only made a few flanelette blankets & when Wilma said to her I will do your little sewing so Annie said I will take care of Glenna (*Wilma's daughter*) I tell you she had everything to make work easy a lovely Singer sewing machine drop head 50 dollars washing machine cost $15 wringer, mop wringer, & such a pantry full of everything useful. He asked me if I had looked the pantry over, I said no not much but I noticed there was a fine collection of useful articles He told me to go*

in & if there was anything I would like or had not got to take it. I thought it looked as if someone tried to see how they could furnish a pantry. A big house, 20 cows on farm & they are fine sleek ones too, Gene owns a good team span of horses good harnesses & waggons beside a sleigh & robes & they were all ready to enjoy life now. He teams winters & earns more than he pays out for help summers. He made or saved their very own 480 some odd dollars for nearly 200 from cows, gets 150 every calf just as soon as they come, that brings him 30 dollars. Wilma said Annie dreaded her confinement — oh such a horror as she had of it. Etherized her, laid her across the bed & Wilma & Gene held her legs. Baby has long mark from eye up to forehead but it is not bad & 2 little dents over left eye. Seems to be in perfect health stretches when it wakes up & looks up at you & smiles & when you lay her down & give her bottle she leans back to see if you are there & sometimes you see her corners of mouth go out smiling a thing I never saw before in one so young, if ever I saw one to smart to live it is that. (...) Annie only nursed her a week, was not that a blessing now to think of. Annie had a big appetite before baby's birth none after tho he tried everything, Had over 20 kinds of things he thought she might like but she could not eat, wanted some beet pickles Gene did not dare let her have it & she ate a little piece he dare not give her more but Wilma said he almost cried he felt so to deny her she looked so wishfully at them. Bureau with bananas & apples & oranges papers full when she was buried cream of wheat grape nuts & 4 kinds Wilma told me of canned meats so you see she took nothing to keep back disease Doctor said very likely Annie had it (tuberculosis) about her & when weakened by the birth & vitality low that asserted itself strongly, Ate dinner with them Fri noon & at Sun that time they were laying her out died 5 minutes to 11. Tues before she fell but on the carpet & it is thickly padded Gene has a pretty carpet in big sitting room, Annie only thought it jarred her & was up Wed & Thurs & Fri as usual when she went to bed Fri night Gene fancied she did not seem so strong & well as usual but she said she was & kept saying every day she thought she was gaining every day a little, but she did not I guess & Sat morning she wanted to get up but Gene saw she was not as well & sent for Doctor & he could not get him till night Dr White came left at 6 told him he felt sure it was tuberculosis but would be back, came at 8 & Gene got Dr Henderson for council. Dr White said she had lost 50 percent since 2 hours then poor Gene knew she was leaving him. All friends came on Sat never suffered just kept growing weaker only spoke of dying once. Then said She was going home never mentioned baby, Annie did not like children she told Wilma so when here. Gene said to me 'Annie did not want a child' — but I suppose he thought her as able to have one as women in general & they had been married 4 years & over & had everything so comfortable he did not see that he should not have a child, they were doing so well took the farm for another year has 16 acres all plowed for another year & is to put in

18 acres. But when baby was born there came another trouble. When asked if she wanted to see the baby she said why yes but she looked & said what a lovely baby I never saw so lovely a baby in my life never was strong enough to hold it & never had it in her arms but once or twice always called it Papas girl every time she spoke to it & she told Gene at once when time to nurse it she did not want to he talked to her she had no nipples Wilma told me & did not want to be tortured to try to draw them out. Annie told Gene she never could wear a decent dress & would spoil it if she did & never could be anything nursing a baby, but Wilma said I pittied Gene he was so patient & pleaded so pitifully said she could almost cry to hear him talk to her said you have plenty of milk & it belongs to the baby & I dont want to give it cows milk. So Wilma said Gene just made her at last, but after a week she had terrible sore nipples, suffered nursing a week & then milk all dried up. I suppose disease set in in so weakened a condition. Gene kept saying while they worked to get baby Yes shes alive oh is she alive, yes, she is all right, I told Wilma — she lacked mother love we are always so ready to give baby all we own & love them so at once. Wilma said she thought in time Annie would have thought more of it when she took care of it & always told me she knew Annie liked it some, Once Wilma said to her, before she got up wouldn't you like to see your baby, oh yes I forgot I had one, she said it was because Annie was so weak & could not have it in bed with her kept it in the sitting room on a lounge, They had a lovely organ "Doherty" make cost Gene a hundred dollars She almost worshipped that she was laid out on another lounge the undertaker & wife laid her out they lay out all the dead nearly in North Troy, I learned some good points about laying out the dead after prayers they had lunch Wilma & a neighbor came & they helped, did Genes noon chores & she helped to get on dinner & help wash dishes had over 30 to dinner. Wilma cooked it — alone except bread, baked beans, bread & butter & tea gingersnaps doughnuts, plain cake & a coconut cake sent by a neighbour who said she wanted to send or do something to help & apple pie Wilma made 12 sat down first & 9 at next, I sat at the undertaker & his man who drives the hearse & 6 ladies who ate with hats on & even furs, lots of style, ladies from Glen Sutton Newport & several other places cousins & aunts of Annie's. The man who married them buried her. (...Clara describes the funeral and sermon in detail.*) when all had looked at her so much I thought they had taken their last look but before I got to church I asked Gene & he said so many who always had known Annie could not come to the home & would be so disappointed so I dreaded that ordeal. I sat close & watched him & many many left in tears. Genie & I last to look & my heart was so weak & trembling from head to foot. I stood there & I felt of each dear little hand like bidding a good bye while he shook so he could hardly stand to walk, he took her head in both hands & stroked the head & hair then leaned into the casket put his face to hers & I prayed*

courtesy of Albion Taylor

I can't write but I must go to bed, Good night & I am so lonely, oh come come yet I know you can t but I am so lonely

God constantly to help him bear it at last I had waited so long I could not stand up longer & I touched his arm & said Genie I cant stand up any longer but he had kissed her & was about to turn away. He told me coming home that if he had not asked God for help & often he could never have gone thro it all (...) He took her wedding dress to Troy had some new over lace put on, the other was soiled had the collar cleaned by gasolene & she was buried in that, her wedding ring on & another small narrow band, She only had on while lying there black stockings, drawers, white skirt white vest perhaps a chemise I do not know, a cousin of hers dressed & put her in the casket cost 41 dollars, lined with white satin & deep lace that hung down. Gene asked me before the flowers was in if it was not lovely I said if such a thing could be lovely, plate said Rest in Peace each letter was flowered, it was silver plated not washed, There were 3 long beautiful sprays of flowers, wide at one end & tied with wide white satin ribbon & run to a point at the other end with five tiny flowers 2 large wreaths (...) Gene said there were 13 dollars worth of flowers, I must close am awfully drilled out, oh how I wish you were here so I could tell you a lot more I cant write but I must go to bed, Good night & I am so lonely, oh come come yet I know you cant but I am so lonely

morning *(...) So many of my poor Genes doings come up before me while looking at the flowers first & when they decided to not take them out till at the church he turned & I saw him put both hands together clasped beginning at the finger tips & oh, I can never forget it, no never then shut his eyes & went out, (...) Her dear little gold bowed glasses lay on the dresser where she laid them Fri night. He had got her a bedroom suit just before she was sick a modern bureau, & dresser & white iron bedstead, now, there they had the wood too like the other pieces if one wants but only costs 100 more & they liked the iron better then when she died they set it up in the sitting room, till that day then it was taken out in morning. Then put back at night, Said he was going to burn up the mattress, but the pillows were some I made him put on new ticks & feathers were some his mother had & he said he could not bear to burn them so they hung on verandah till that morning all cleared off & took into shed kitchen. But I dont think she had it long enough to make so bad mark as if she had coughed long, had just began to cough (...) no one knows how nearly one half of us have this (tuberculosis) Gene said she had always coughed had some ever since he knew her. She wrote me the last time she wrote she could scarcely handle her hands They were so numb, just like sticks & prickled so, She thought it bad circulation & it hurt her so to sew that was why he bought the baby clothes. He had 2 of those zephyr jackets pale pink & white, one shirt I think & he told Wilma to dress Ethel up in good shape so she did I took all the care of Ethel that day till I left, oh so many nearly every woman there said I want to see that baby, She looked cute enough. Gene came to look at her & almost smiled I urged Gene to see to his life insurance for if he had it left as it was running to Annie it might not amount to much if he were taken away, but to have it going to Ethel at once then if he lived he could take care of her & if he did not she would have a thousand of her own Annie's only sister who lives in North Troy would take the baby if he would give it to them she would bring her up & clothe & educate her but not unless he would oh how he ground his teeth he said if anyone had it for a time, if he had to let it go, he wanted to buy all its clothes & pay for every drop of milk she had & not give it up (...) no Lessie I made a mistake in the day of the week. She had baby on Thurs takes sick on Tues because I told all Ethel was 6 weeks old tomorrow at the funeral.*

Good bye dear Sister
I wish you would write to me

I promised to write to Hattie Arel Annie's sister & I must write to dear Mrs Honsinger, I found some of Annie's old low shoes, I wanted & a good almost new pair he paid $2.00 for he gave me & she had a new pair beside, only a little soiled.

This is just one letter in a life-long correspondence between Clara Oakley Call and her sister Elva Celesta (Lessie) Oakley Taylor. Clara Oakley was born January 2, 1854 in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. She died sometime in 1918. Her younger sister Celeste was born June 27, 1860 and died in 1937. It was through Celeste that I came to know both sisters and something of their lives and their world. And it was completely by chance that their memories survived.

The letters, diary fragments, household accounts and other personal memorabilia that make up Celesta's legacy were found in a cardboard box in the attic of an Eastern Townships cabin by my brother, Marco Fraticelli, only a few years ago. Marco, myself and our friend Maria Murphy set about trying to make these tiny bits of paper, hand-filled notebooks and scraps of letters sensible to us.

Months of work editing and transcribing allowed us to determine that the bulk of the writing, diary entries from 1905 to 1916, were the work of Celesta. Gradually the chronicle of the lives of these women began to emerge. Both Clara and Celesta had to struggle to survive as single mothers with young children and no income. And they did so only through their own resourcefulness and ingenuity. Celesta had raised and sold singing birds. Both sisters, though they had no formal training, considered themselves, and were considered by their community to be, medical women and profited from their medical skills.

In the letter reproduced above, there is a marked (and, to us, astonishing) familiarity and ease in Clara's description and reaction to death. Certainly it is an emotional, unhappy occasion; she loves her step-son Gene and shares his grief and affection for his wife Annie; but in their lives as in their writing, death is a constant and immediate presence. The business of living and dying forms a continuous grid in their lives. This letter's matter-of-fact attitude towards the distribution of Annie's personal belongings is typical.

Celesta's diaries reveal this common mix of the tragic and the banal. Initially, the diary was little more than a household ledger of basic activities and expenses:

"Commenced a big tub of butter. Mr. Blake left for Stuckely."

"Awful tired. Eight to dinner, supper, overnight and breakfast."

"Elmo died. Henry with saw to Montreal ... made cross for Elmo."

But as time goes on Celesta seems to grow more comfortable with the medium. The entries become longer and longer and she begins to record her responses to the events she records: the diary becomes a confidante available to her when Clara is not.

Sad. Arose at 5 o'clock, did a lot of work. 'I don't intend you shall want for anything as long as I am here in my home.' Strange talk that...

Very hot day. I sowed some. The boys and Henry worked in the hay. Henry pretty wrathy because it had been left so long. Said he was going to put the boys in school and shut up the home this fall and let me go where I would enjoy myself with Evelyn...

.....lonely and sad nowadays.....wish I had some money to paddle with...

Through both the diaries and the letters one recognizes a powerful vulnerability. Both when they are left or widowed, and after they have found "second" homes for themselves, Celesta and Clara, no doubt like many women of their time and station, are very much dependent not only for their physical survival but also for their social well being on the men they can find to accept them. But their security is always tenuous and, in the end, short-lived.

Apart from the love for their children (powerful bonds for both women), Clara and Celesta have only each other. The bond between them, as evinced in this letter, is intimate and enduring. The "precious" love they share is as genuine as it is rare.

Rina Fraticelli

Five photographs

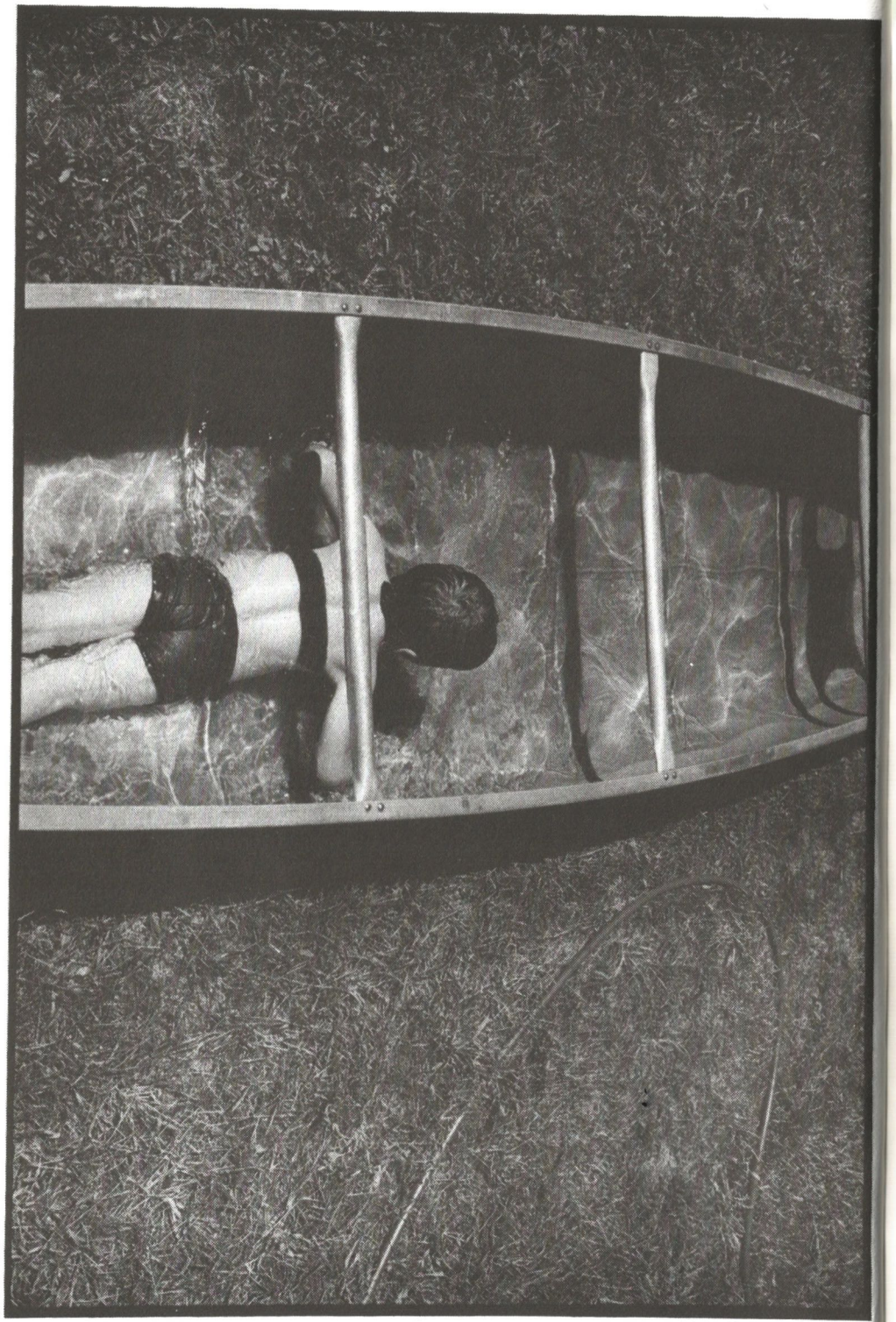
silver print 7" x 11"

Beth Wilcox

The other night a friend of mine told me that you had known more about her than her own mother. She said the reason was because you were a very good listener and a very understanding one. Ever since that night you've been on my mind and in my dreams.It's true you were very sensitive, sometimes too much for your own good. I wince now to think of the time, when I was six and having the stomach flu asked for Dad to be with me instead of you. You were so hurt: to this day I remember the pain in your face that you tried to conceal. I know you felt alone most of your life. I know you felt robbed of your real mother and guilty for her absence. In forty years your father never mentioned her, as though no one was missing. And so you learned to keep your hurts prisoners. As your own children grew older and away from you that loneliness engulfed you. I was too young and absorbed in myself, my world, my friends to see you drifting. Never once did you demand something for yourself from me. I wish I could say I am not angry at your silence. The weight of years of isolation must have felt very heavy when the last child left and your house was finally empty. After I was gone we became friends and towards the end we had never been closer. Sometimes I close my eyes and I can feel you, touch your flesh, hear your voice, but not for long. The last day in the hospital when they gave us your dress, your shoes, your purse, and we walked wet-faced in disbelief through the corridors with these, your broken parts.

silver print 8" x 13"

silver print 8" x 13"



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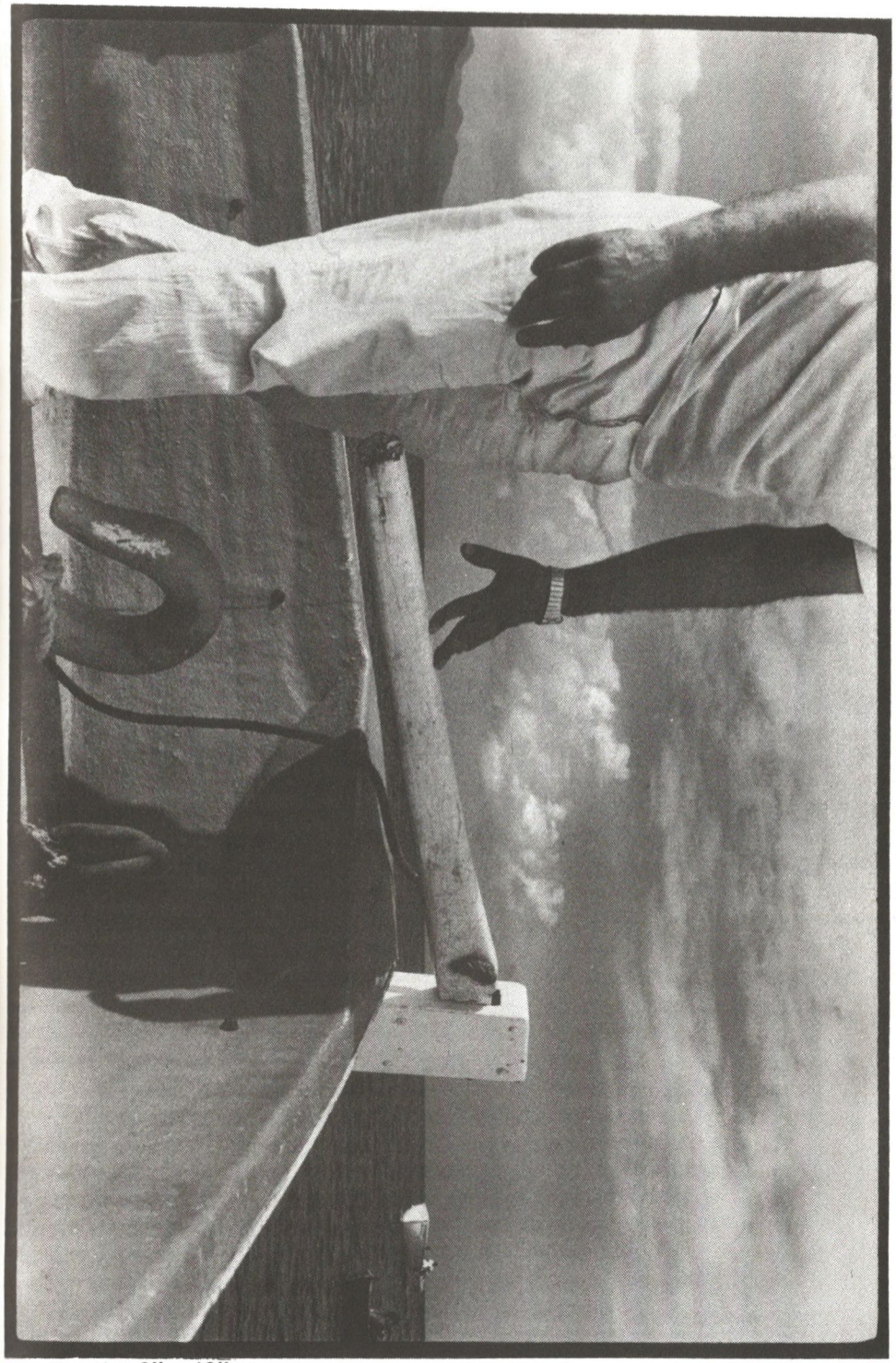

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To Harrell
From A Friend Of May Joy

Arny Christine Straayer

I

I've been wondering about your ears, Harrell.
Not that they're the most important thing about you
Or even what I'd notice first if we met
But what would happen if I said,
"Seventy-two years is a long time."
And you heard me.
Not that your age is the most important thing
Or even what I'd notice first if we met
But you've probably heard a lot of things
In your time.

II

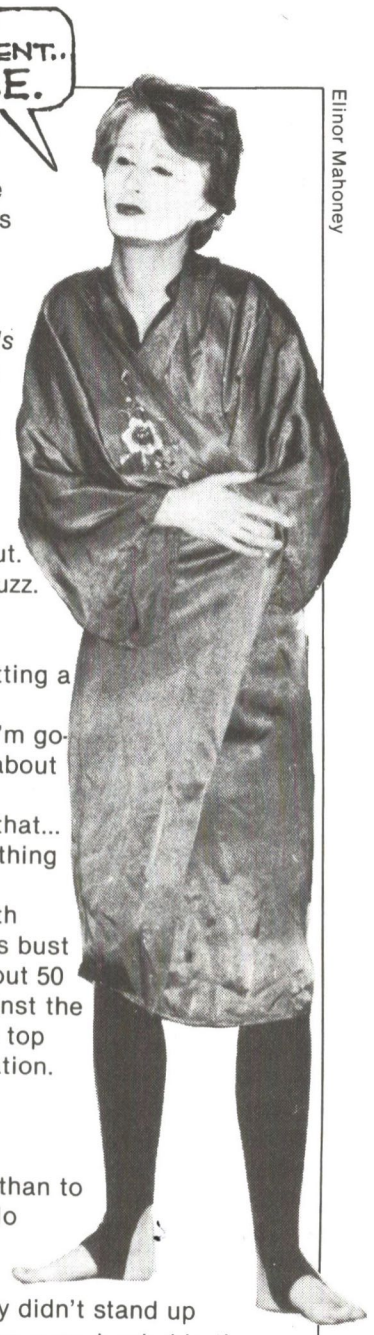
I've been wondering about your ears, Harrell:
If you ever wore those clip-on earrings
Each with a cluster of sixteen red stones,
If one ever made a clunk against the door
As you stood listening to your daughters talk,
Or if you wouldn't be caught dead in the clip-on kind.

III

I've been wondering about your ears, Harrell.
Not that they're the most important thing about you
Or even what I'd notice first if we met
But what if I said
"Where're the Q-tips?"
Or "Roses are best when they're red."
Or "Anyone who would call her daughter May Joy
Shouldn't be surprised by whatever she does."
Would your ears pick up at any of these?
Well, where are the Q-tips?

PINK TRIANGLE TEARS

excerpts from a play by Gay Bell



Elinor Mahoney

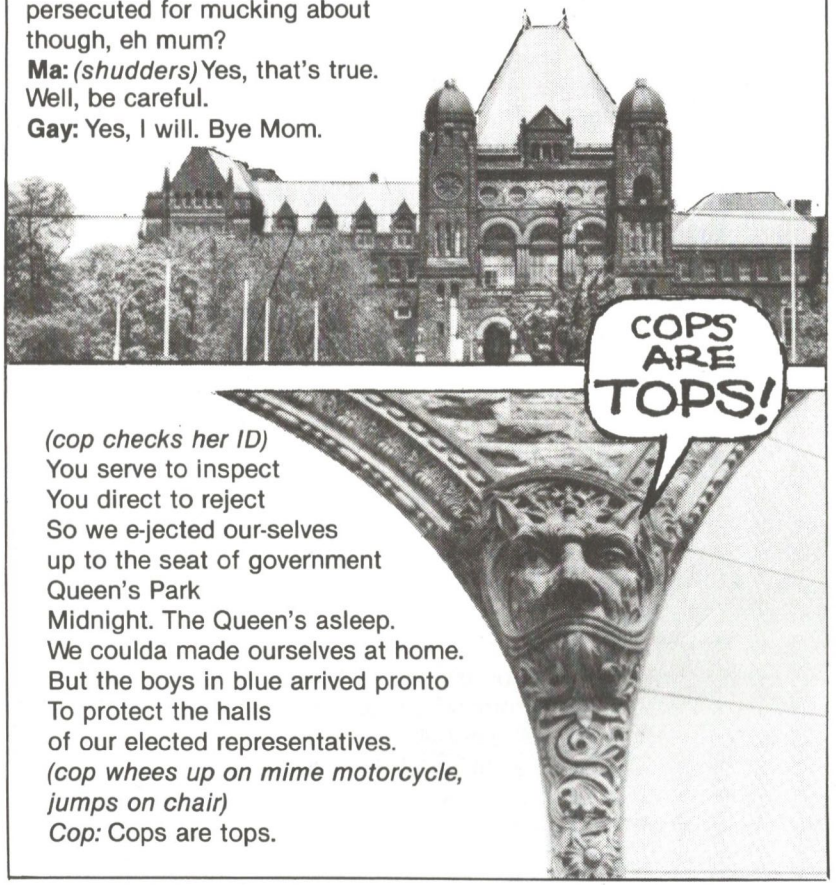
These are old hands
I am an old hand
My hands remind me
of my mother's hands
The veins stick up
The knuckles are
lengthy
(picks up phone, dials and speaks numbers she is dialing)
1-528- weo weo your-
self. tick tick tick
yourself.

Gay: 1-528-3905 Hi mere.
Ma: Oh, hello. I was just on my way out. What did you say? There's an awful buzz.
Gay: The buzz is the RCMP. They bug telephones.
Ma: Well, I can't hear very well. I'm getting a little deaf. Where are you?
Gay: Toronto. I'm on my way out too. I'm going to a demonstration. Did you read about the police raids on the steam baths?
Ma: Oh Gay, don't you get involved in that... that's not your affair. I don't know anything about those places really.
Gay: About 300 men were charged. With sledgehammers and crowbars the cops bust into baths where men were naked. About 50 or 60 men were made to stand up against the cubicles with their hands grasping the top ledges, under intense lights, no ventilation. One man fainted...
Ma: Well, it serves them right!
Gay: What?
Ma: All those men should know better than to go naked together... it's narcissistic! No wonder they got raided.

Gay: No mother, they didn't stand up there voluntarily. They were herded in there. The police forced them.
Ma: Oh, well that's not right. I don't believe in that...

Gay: Mother, I know you've lived through two world wars, but maybe there's something you don't know about. When Hitler came to power, he closed down gay bars: a lot of homosexuals were arrested and beaten.

I know it's not a very pleasant subject, mum, but have you ever heard of the pink triangle? That's what gays had to wear in the concentration camps. About a quarter of a million of us were exterminated in those camps.
(to herself) ... god, she's 80 years old, she's gonna croak. I can just see the headlines: "MOTHER DIES FROM ATTACK ON GAYS"
Ma: Well, you could give it up.
Gay: What? Give up being gay? Women are the source of my inspiration. I love women.
Ma: It's not that you love women. I love women too, men pooh... What I don't approve of is mucking about.
Gay: Hehn hehn... You gotta admit that people should not be persecuted for mucking about though, eh mum?
Ma: *(shudders)* Yes, that's true. Well, be careful.
Gay: Yes, I will. Bye Mom.



(cop checks her ID)
You serve to inspect
You direct to reject
So we e-jected our-selves
up to the seat of government
Queen's Park
Midnight. The Queen's asleep.
We coulda made ourselves at home.
But the boys in blue arrived pronto
To protect the halls
of our elected representatives.
(cop whees up on mime motorcycle, jumps on chair)
Cop: Cops are tops.

courtesy of The Body Politic

I steady my body over a black and blue
That's me 'n you's black 'n blue
a black Yonge Street
Even the tiny stars
of cops' identification badges
plucked out
like the eyes of a rational society
plucked out.
Arrive at cop station, 52 Division
a modern design
an ice sculpture of eggcrates
lit from inside the eggs
One hundred and ninety-five
policemen
eggsaggerratedly on guard.

FUCK YOU 52, FUCK YOU 52.
No tanks, but lotsa tow trucks
just in case we go wild
at the sight of so many manly bodies.

Gay: They're the ones who are obscene.
Queen's Park is a common bawdy house. We
know where the thrust comes from. It's our *(indicates self and audience)* bodies are being
sold. And you're the ones living off the avails.
Cop: The Premier of Ontario is out to show
his in-de-faggot-able machismo.

MAJORITY BLUES

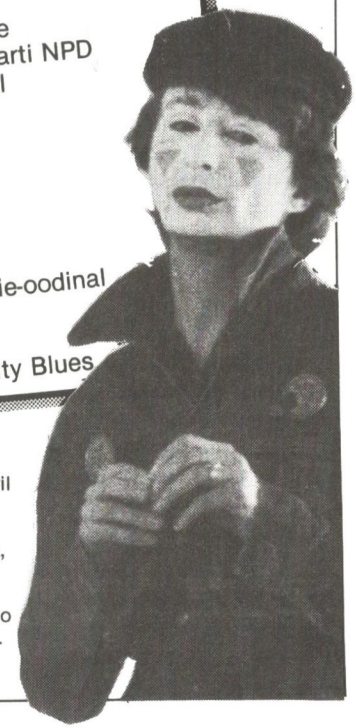
It makes me sick sick sick to be a prick prick prick
Coz if there's one thing I don' wanna do
It's walk in Bill Davis' shoes
Coz that man gives me the MAJORITY BLUES.

O the gays walked up to the NDP
Who said: Constitutionally we agree
But when it comes to the crunch
We'll be out to lunch
With everybody's favourite PC
Oh, I've got the ca-ca-pitulating, arse-lickin'
Fraternity blues.

It's happening on a global scale
Margaret Thatcher's marrying the Globe & Mail
Oh, I've got the White Anglo Saxon
Protestant
Heterosexual Male
Meat-eatin' Dominatin'
Aggravatin'
Major-**wow-wow** wity Blues

Si vous êtes gai ou lesbienne
Ce n'est pas le fun se sentir undone
Deux fois dans une année, par le parti NPD
P'is on devrait leur tapper sur le cul
Les Majorité Blues

They used to call us fruits
Now they call us fems
Whatever they call us babe
It's different from them
I've got the patriarchal attitudinal
Doesn't know how to boogie-oodinal
Progressive Conservative
Poisonous Preservative
Party Major-**roar-roar-roar**-ity Blues



Elinor Mahoney

Pink Triangle Tears: first performed at an April 4, '81 educational sponsored by Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere with Marcia Cannon acting the cop as well as ma, undercover cop, Cassidy, Smith and Davis, while Gay Bell acted Gay.

Please address inquiries about full script to Gay Bell, 43 Simpson Ave., Toronto M4K 1A1.

READER SURVEY

We'd like to thank all the subscribers who sent in completed readership survey forms. About 10% of our subscribers responded, and we know a lot more about you than we did before. Although only about 1/3 of those who live in Toronto have attended Fireweed events such as the Fireweed Festival or the Fireworks Drama Festival, 2/3 and more are anxious to attend such events in the future. We're glad to announce that we are already planning this year's Fall Festival, our fourth.

A lot of people had suggestions about themes for future issues and several coincided with our own plans: an issue on the experience of women from other cultures who are living in Canada; an issue on generational ties; one on Third World women; and an issue on the image of women in popular culture. Other good suggestions were that we cover the rural vs urban experience, female sexuality, the nature of volunteer labour, and women and health.

Perhaps those readers who take objection to some of our content did not respond, but no one who sent in the survey found that our material offended them. As one reader wrote, "If it does, it may be because it will be another ten years before I can laugh at some things; they hurt too much now."

We wish it were possible for us to respond to some of your suggestions about design. Although most people were happy with our production, you did ask for better quality reproductions. We very much regret not being able to make this improvement, but the cost would be prohibitive. We were encouraged by many readers' comments that you would enjoy reading longer and more theoretical articles. This reaffirms our commitment to comprehensive pieces.

We learned from the survey that you're a very polymorphous group, with a wide range of age groups (although the majority are 25-34 years old), income levels and educational backgrounds.

Thank you again for your response — it fulfilled our voyeuristic tendencies!

OURSTORY

FIREWEED is and will continue to be a journal in the process of continual change and growth as Collective members leave and new women bring their ideas and energy into the shaping of the journal. This section is intended to keep you in touch with the women working on **FIREWEED**.

Joining the Collective:

Carolyn Smart, a poet whose first book *Swimmers in Oblivion* will be published this fall by York Publishing, joined the Collective with this issue. Her professionalism, enthusiasm and cool head in managing issue 10 have contributed enormously to the Collective, and her strength in criticism has raised the level of our editorial meetings. But can she knit?

Acknowledgements

The Collective would like to express our appreciation and special thanks to the friends and associate members who willingly and enthusiastically offered their time and talent in the publication of this issue: **Joanne Gormley**, for her hard work on distribution in Montreal; **Sheila Block**, for all her promotional efforts in Vancouver; **Gaynor Carney**, for doing our distribution in Toronto; **Sheilagh Crandall**, for taking over our books; and to all the people who showed such support for **FIREWEED** by writing to the Canada Council on our behalf.

The **FIREWEED** Collective would like to thank the following individuals for their generous donations to the journal: **Kandace Kerr, Leslie Padorr, Donna Stephenson, Anne McLean, Christine Gaucher, Maureen Harris, Marilynne Bell**, and **L. Erickson-Fraser**. We would like to give special thanks to **Mary Meigs** and also wish to thank the **Gay Community Appeal** for their generous grant.

Contributors' notes

Margaret Atwood has published numerous books of poetry and prose. The latest is *True Stories* (Oxford University Press, 1981). **Ellen Bass'** most recent collection of poetry is *For Earthly Survival* (Moving Parts Press, 1980). She lives in Aptos, California, and is currently editing an anthology of first-person poems by people who were molested as children. She teaches writing workshops for women. **Gay Bell** is a lesbian activist, writer and actor, currently involved in a neighbourhood theatre group, Pelican Players, with Robin Endres.

Roo Borson is a poet currently living in Toronto. Her most recent books are *In The Smoky Light of The Fields* (Three Trees Press, 1980), *Rain* (Penumbra Press, 1980) and *A Sad Device* (Quadrant Books, 1981). **Marilyn Bowering**, a British Columbian poet, is living in Scotland this year. Her latest publication is *Sleeping With Lambs* (Press Porcepic, 1980). **Anne Collins** is a writer and freelance editor. Her work has appeared in Aurora II.

Elda Concordia is a student at Chester Boulevard Public School. **Rina Fraticelli** is a member of the FIREWEED Collective, whose performance installation *Picnic In The Drift* is a workshop at the Toronto Theatre Festival this May. **Karen Frazier** is a poet from Nashville, Tennessee.

April Marshall is a student at Chester Boulevard Public School. **Denise Maxwell** is a graphic artist and a member of the FIREWEED Collective. **Anne McLean** is a writer from Montreal currently living in Hydra, Greece. Her work has been widely published in Canada.

Mary Meigs is an artist and writer. She was born in Philadelphia in 1917, and her one-woman shows have been exhibited in Boston, New York City, Paris and Montreal. She has lived in Canada since 1974. **Erin Mouré**'s collection of poetry *Empire York Street* was published by the House of Anansi in 1979, and was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award. A small suite of poems entitled *The Whisky Vigil* is forthcoming from Harbour Publishing. **Greta Nemiroff**'s story is part of a collection entitled *Dismemberment or the Anatomy of Love*. She lives in Montreal and is Director of The New School, Dawson College.

Maureen Paxton's work has appeared in FIREWEED issues 5/6, 8 and 9. She works out of Toronto in both commercial and fine art. **Arny Christine Straayer** lives in Chicago. She is co-editor of Black Maria magazine and co-founder of Metis Press. Her latest book is entitled *The Rock*. **Anne Szumigalski** was born in England and has lived in Saskatchewan since 1952. Her most recent book is *A Game of Angels* (Turnstone Press, 1980).

Meagan Ward is finishing grade six this year at Cottingham Junior Public School. **Shirley Whitaker** is a Toronto visual artist, currently working for a flag company. **Beth Wilcox** is a Toronto photographer and works as an assistant editor at Photo Communique.

Erratum

The editors regret that due to a production error, the following acknowledgement was omitted from "Invisible Disabilities," which appeared as a special Health Supplement in Issue 9: The authors would like to express their thanks to the many individuals and organizations whose information-sharing contributed to this study. It should be noted that this paper originated from the authors' research, contracted in July 1980 by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, to provide documentation for the Council's Brief to the Federal Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped, Ottawa, September, 1980.

Writing

This Writing Issue contains short stories by **Anne McLean**, **Margaret Atwood**, **Anne Collins** and **Greta Nemiroff**, plus new poems by **Ellen Bass**, **Erin Mouré**, **Marilyn Bowering** and **Roo Borson**, as well as prose poems by **Anne Szumigalski**. There is a selection from the memoirs of **Mary Meigs**, the photographs of **Beth Wilcox**, and varied forms of writing from many different sources: a literary extravaganza you can't miss.