Lesbian Voices Wat Hit Ro. 4





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Lesbians Velses was founded in December, my pornography - all of which treat lesbia



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A Skeptic's Prayer

Almighty God (if you are, God) -This is your essence to me:
The power of vision, that into
Each one's secret heart you see
And seeing, understand what even
She herself cannot -All the whys and wherefores
Of each tiny turn in her course,
All things that work on mind

And heart: persuasive force
That bends her will and thrusts
Her into aught.

Could any god -- knowing all the things
That words can't tell -Condemn the pawn called woman

To Everlasting Hell?

- ENIKKI





By Rosalie Nichols

(A speech delivered at San Jose Gay Freedom Day, June 22, 1980)

Freedom from religion is a heavy subject, and I can tell you're not in the mood for any speeches, so I would like to tell you a simple story. This is a true story:

Once upon a time back in 1474 at a place called Basel, a rooster—to everyone's shock and dismay -- laid an egg. The rooster and his egg were subsequently put on trial, convicted, and burned at the stake. Now, why should a rooster be burned at the stake simply for laying an egg? Well, first of all, the Bible says, "Male and female created he them." So, any creature of nature that did not fall distinctly into the male or female category had to be the work of the devil, right?

But, in addition, the Church and the people of the Middle Ages believed in a monster known as the cockatrice, or basilisk, which is mentioned in the Bible. This fearful creature was produced if a cock's egg was set upon by a snake, bringing forth a cockatrice, with the body of a snake and the head of a cock with a treble comb on its forehead.

The cockatrice killed all living things. It burned up the grass with its

hot and poisonous breath, and the fowls of the air fell down dead when they came near its nest. People, including the Church fathers and civil authorities, really believed this, however ridiculous it might sound to us in this age of science. So, when our unfortunate rooster laid his egg in 1474, the medieval Christians were alarmed. Not only might a cockatrice hatch from the egg, but it was also well known that cock's eggs furnished the most active ingredients of witch ointment. Therefore, the rooster and his egg were duly put on trial:

Attended by a large concourse of people, the trial was held on a hill and conducted with a dignity appropriate to the occasion.

The prosecution proved that a sorcerer would rather possess a cock's egg than be master of the philosopher's stone. It was asserted too, that in pagan lands Satan employed witches to hatch such eggs, from which proceeded animals most injurious to all of the Christian faith and race.

Counsel for the defence had no option but to admit the facts of the case, but asked what evil animus had been proved against his client. What injury to man or beast had it affected? Besides, the laying of the egg was an involuntary act, and as such, not punishable by law. If the crime of sorcery were imputed, the cock was innocent; for there was no instance on record of Satan ever having made a compact with one of the brute creation.

The public prosecutor declared in reply that, though the devil did not make compacts with brutes, he sometimes entered into them. So much was sure from the scriptural account of the Gadarene swine which, possessed by devils, were involuntary agents. Nevertheless, these pigs were punished by being made to run down a steep place into the sea, and so they perished in the waters. So the cock of Basel was condemned to death, not as a cock, but as a sorcerer or devil in the form of a cock. With its egg it was burned at the stake with all the due form and solemnity of a judicial punishment.

In the story of this trial in 1474, we can begin to understand how deep lie the roots of the religious persecution of anyone who does not fit the Biblical concept of male and female. This includes hermaphrodites, transexuals, transvestites, asexuals, and homosexuals. If the Bible says "male and female created he them" and "be fruitful and multiply," then anything, any animal, or any human being who does

not fit those simplistic beliefs must be evil, unnatural, or possessed by the devil.

We have made some progress since 1474, but we have not come far. In spite of all the scientific knowledge gained and all the modern technology produced, there are still people who believe *literally* in every word of the Bible and would turn the clock back to 1474 if they could. And they are winning now.

The attack on gay rights is just one sign of the times. These fundamentalists, with their medieval mentality, are working desperately to keep woman in the inferior position she has always held under their religion. Even Anita Bryant, now that she has filed for divorce, complains that the church pays too much attention to Biblical injunctions requiring wives to be submissive.

The fundamentalists also are attacking birth control, abortion, children's rights -- anything they perceive as detrimental to the traditional Christian family of, as TV Evangelist Jerry Falwell would say, "one man and one woman for one lifetime" -- with man as head and woman as helpmate and the children as property to be controlled, disciplined, abused, with no will of their own and no legal recourse.

Also, the fundamentalists are attacking what they perceive as "liberal education." We have all read of their attack on sex education, which they object to because it does not teach their religious views on chastity, marriage, monogamy, and the traditional family. They want to put prayers back into public schools despite our Constitutional principle of separation of church and state, and they have widespread public support for overturning the Supreme Court decision which eliminated religious exercises from our secular school system.

But more significantly, they have developed a strong drive to have the creation story of Genesis taught in schools -- not, I wish to point out, as a religious exercise, but as science! In other words, they want their mystical beliefs, their religious views which they have accepted on faith taught in science class side by side with scientific theories and scientific laws which have been established through meticulous observation, experimentation, and reason. This makes as much sense as teaching about the "tooth fairy" in a course on dentistry. They wish to raise a whole new generation of schoolkids to not think, but to be brainwashed into accepting unsupported dogma on faith and under the weight of Biblical authority.

Every advance that gay people have made has been made through science and reason. The work of anthropologists and psychologists has overturned much of the superstition and dogma against us. The work of modern philosophers and legal minds has cleared away some of the ancient theocratic laws against us. We cannot afford to let our friends, science and reason, be banished from the public schools and from public life and let our enemies, mythology and irrationality, be put in

their places as standards for society.

We know that the Mormons and fundamentalists who opposed us this June 3rd operate under an authoritarian structure in their churches and in their homes. Now they want to bring authoritarianism back into the public schools, back into public life, back into our government. And they are winning.

Friends, we are in deep trouble. Every person here should become aware of what these religious powermongers are doing and the danger it presents to us. What can we do? We found out over the last two years of struggle, culminating on Black Tuesday, June 3rd [the day gay rights lost in San Jose], that straight people are very hard to reach with our concerns. On June 3rd, the public had a choice between civil rights and Biblical Morality, and they overwhelmingly chose Biblical Morality.

There was never any basis for our opponents' accusations against gay people. They resorted to lies, distortions, and gut level prejudice. They lied about us, they lied about the ordinances. Ministers of the Gospel and Attorneys at Law signed their names to lies and published them in the press, and one of them has now been elected a Municipal Court Judge.

All our efforts to stop the religious backlash failed, and there seems little hope of reaching the general public as long as they are caught up in the anxiety of inflation, recession, shortages, urban congestion, and the threat of war. We are facing hard times, and in hard times, it is easy to set up an unpopular group as a scapegoat, and it looks like we are it. Just as we were it in Nazi Germany -- and then the gypsies, and then the Jews, and then the mentally retarded, and on and on.

We did not succeed in achieving social freedom this June. But what we can do is preserve the freedom of our own minds and spirits. We can recognize that when our opponents accuse us of bringing about social decay and the Fall of the American Empire, the development of their minds has been arrested at the level of the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. When they accuse us of being immoral -- or as Archbishop Quinn put it, "gravely evil" -- we can recognize that their concept of morality has never progressed beyond the superstitions of the Middle Ages.

We are not immoral. Our morality is based on humanism, on love for each other and for life on this earth. We are not unnatural. We are the children of nature. And we are truly everywhere.

The above excerpt and other information about the Cock of Basel is taken from A.J. Marshall's Introduction to Intersexuality in Vertebrates Including Man. Marshall's account of the trial is based on Chambers' The Book of Days, 1864, I. London. See also Evans, The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals, 1906, London.

This speech appeared in the August 1980 issue of *GALA Review*, published by the Gay Atheists League of America. P.O. Box 14142, San Francisco, CA 94114.

I was born in the 1920s in a small college town in the northeast. My father was a college professor, and my mother a laboratory technician. The Depression reduced us to a state of genteel poverty, accompanied by a luxurious house, high mortgage payments, and a scarcity of food and fancy dress. Nevertheless, the environment was a rich one, with classical records, musical instruments and a fantastic collection of books.

As a child, I loved to play scrub with the boys, do nature-studying in the woods, and alternately dreamed of being a naturalist like John Muir, an artist like Rembrandt, or a composer like Mozart. The one significant thing I did was purchase a camera, an act that was to influence the entirety of my future life.

I was unhappy, in spite of these advantages, for I found male dominance oppressive, and right-wing ideologies suffocating. In the early 1940s, I ran away from home, hitchhiked to the West Coast and found work in the shipyards. For a green, inexperienced youngster, my new "education" in the school of hard knocks and street-savvy was as essential an experience in understanding the kind of world we live in and thinking out solutions for the many, many problems.

Amerikan life is so unbelievably complex and has so many interlocking mazes of man's inhumanity to man (and woman) that no simple slogan, no absolutist position can really give the answer. For example, I have never liked the police. After all, haven't they harassed me, called me a 'she-male,' and stopped me in the streets demanding identification when I was young? Yet, during the 1975 Gay Parade, when a creep almost murdered me by throwing an iron wastepaper basket into the street from a fifth-story window, I loved the uniformed officer who entered the Sequoia Hotel to arrest her. Now, racism is rotten-I detest it. Yet, males of other races (and, of course, white men too) can be awfully macho and brutal. Is one supposed to join the Ku Klux Klan, or hate all underprivileged people, and plot their extermination? Or can one embrace a creed that fights racism, sexism, and brutality simultaneously?

I am a worker, and I am poor. I have worked in the shipyards, the machine shops, and presently work as a chemist-bacteriologist in a quality control laboratory. My education and white-collar prestige does not stop the actuality of my being a worker and being very poor. Humans who happen to be gay and eccentric and female are most likely to be poor. Humans who are not gay or eccentric, yet nevertheless female still are workers and very poor. A long time ago, all workers, male, female, and children, were extremely poor. They worked 12 to 16 hours in factories, coal mines and steel mills for starvation wages. Many were crippled by unsafe machinery, sickened by fumes and dust, or burned alive by molten steel or coal mine explosions. Better conditions and wages for male workers were brought on by the rise of labor unions and social legislation initiated by socialists and liberals. They were not instigated by Ayn Rand's non-existent idyllic capitalists! Now that men are having it so much better. I support ERA to the fullest extent to bring these advantages in addition to women. And I ask how, in the name of the Great God Galt!, can anyone wish to revive the miserable conditions that haunted the times of Charles Dickens.

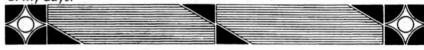
Politically, I'll call myself a humanitarian and one who seeks the golden mean, rather than the totalitarian alternatives of pure Kommunism or pure Kapitalism. Pure Kapitalism means the right for a factory owner to pay his workers a below-subsistence wage, maintain unsafe working conditions, and pollute the atmosphere and water at will. He will have a competitive advantage over other capitalists, and they must do the same or face bankruptcy. A few mill-owners of the early 19th century were decent: Robert Owens for one, Iosiah Wedgewood for another -- as a whole, the entire industrial atmosphere was poisoned. Now, what if Beethoven were a millhand, or Mozart a coalminer -could they possibly create under these conditions? Can paintings be produced in a flophouse? Or sonatas under a bridge? It's a self-fulfilling prophecy when you rob a man of his shoes and then call him a "barefoot bum"! For these reasons, I support just laws against the terrible crimes of exploitation and the maining of workers, in the same light as I oppose robbery and assault.

I do not hate rich people and have no desire to line them up against the wall and shoot them. Personally, I prefer to live in an affluent neighborhood because I love groovy English manor houses, luxurient vegetation and the absence of decibel levels that shatter the atmosphere of slums and semi-industrial quarters. The best defense of capitalism I've heard came from the left-wing author and publisher I.F. Stone. He stated simply (in a Vietnam Teach-In at U.C. Berkeley, 1965) that in a non-capitalist country, there would be no way in which he could publish the I.F. Stone Newsletter. A Jugoslavian Consul lectured an Anarchist group once on the glories of Jugoslavia. He said, however, that one could never start a religious or philosophical cult: one had the

choice of being a Roman Catholic, a Greek Orthodox, or a Moslem. Similarly, one could not publish a private journal, not even print a beat-nik poetry magazine on one's own. There were only Government publishing houses, complete with censors and political reviewers. Capitalism is efficient and, in principled firms, can produce the finest of quality goods. At the same time, it's **unfair** to all of the wage and salaried workers (managers too) who receive such a small fragment of the pie. Many workers are gifted, many managers are talented, yet 90% of the profits of large firms go into dividends, capital gains, trusts and estates as a form of unearned wealth to the heirs of the great 19th century fortunes. To invert Ayn Rand's slogan, the idle non-productive coupon-slippers are mooching on the labor of the productive middle-class and poor.

So much for politics. I'll conclude that after a 48 to 60 hour week, I devote my time to nature photography, birdwatching, gardening, and writing angry letters to editors, which the Co-op News invariably prints and which the S.F. Chronicle never prints, so radical are their views (such as advising celibacy and Lesbianism as a cure for runaway population growth, or this thing about Florida oranges).

I do want a humane world, a humane economy, and full rights for eagles, hummingbirds and whales. For these, I will work until the end of my days.



[The following item was sent in following press reports of the discovery of Lesbian seagulls in Santa Barbara, California, by scientists investigating nests containing twice the usual number of eggs.--Editor]

In relation to Sapphic seagulls, I will add that my "adopted children," Hilda and Hortense were homosexual-hens. I bought them in 1972 for seventy-five cents each: Two little fluffballs that went peep, peep. The winter was a cold one, and they constantly huddled together for warmth. In the spring and summer, I brought them outside into the garden where they followed each other like sisters. Hilda (the barred Plymouth Rock) dominated Hortense (the Rhode Island Red); yet if I separated them, they both would cry out in hysteria and panic. At night, they slept on the roost, Hortense on top of Hilda, always. They did not live long. One day some animal (dog? oppossum? raccoon?) broke into the henhouse and killed them. They were side by side, as they had always been in life -- as lovers and sisters. They had never known a rooster.

-- Submitted by Barbara Stephens



I remember, as the scarlet clouds enfolded my brain: they told me that I could travel to any age that my heart desired. They told me to think beautiful thoughts, and all that was good and sweet and sensitive in me would do the rest. The cider was sparkling and tangy, and the sugar cube dissolved in it readily. I drank it smilingly and closed my eyes, facing the sun.

I remember the room -- with scarlet-phlocked wallpaper and silver brocade drapes. Outside was the winter garden, out in the Sally-Garden of Kate Greenaway time, with curving brick walls and icicle-fretting on the trellisses. The drone of tabla and sitar resounded from the stereo, dancing arabesques before my eyes.

At first, the after-image of the sun remained on the retina a long time before the tenuous clouds of scarlet closed in, wavering before a pulsing mandala of scintillating light. A few whispers interrupted my vision, yet they too passed away.

They had said this acid had been hidden in the x-ray room -- it may have mutated, perhaps altering its orientation to time. One recalled H.G. Well's Time Machine, which catapulted the hero onto a dreary beach overrun with scorpions in some unfathomable future.

I projected my thoughts as a welter of Persian fabrics, Grecian temples, and Victorian parlours tumbled in my imagination. Somewhere, in the islands of Lesbos, or in a Mozartean ballroom, or a Sally-Garden of long ago, my dream awaited me: slender, ethereal, in a veil of joy and tears. "Alice, Alice, wherever you are, come back, speak to me, listen and believe!"

Alice was only a painting, a masterpiece by William Merritt Chase, which haunted my girlhood. I, who have never found my ideal in real life, dreamed of her continually, as Orpheus had pursued his Eurydice. The Dance of the Spirits welled in my brain when Alice appeared in the garden. And the trellis was festooned with roses, and birdsong and Spring adorned with blossoms was here again, and there was no grief nor sorrow, never, and never again. Nevermore the shadow of longing as I cried in joy. Yet Alice was gone, and the garden and all the promise that the spring of joy had ushered in.

A cold draft and roll of thunder pealed in a darkness, and a tolling of bells. Brief flares of lightning illuminated stately Victorians on a hill, swaying, windows blinking before crumbling to dust. I saw the temple by the Marina dance in slow motion, columns tumbling, huge urns

crashing noiselessly into the lagoon. Then, on a hill above the Campanile, the Temple of the Winds and the Spanish Castle dissolved as fissures engulfed the earth, and Corinthian columns melted in.

Eons of terror, epochs of sorrow rushed on the wings of time, of expanding mushroom clouds and burning incandescent light.

Mercifully, time was fleeting and pain momentarily brief, as I recovered in a Pompeian room. Sweet faces attended me and reassured me that they didn't consider me insane. There had been other travelers from the 20th century, perhaps from that same batch of altered indole-rings. I felt a sense of de ja vu about the house; yes, they told me, I had been there before.

The house had survived the 1923 fire, and the 1984 quake, and held together even through the Fifty-Year War. I noticed that they all were women, and I wondered why. One smiled faintly and kissed me on the cheek; others caressed my hand and bid me to rest.

I slept fitfully, haunted by dreams of temples and spires and chambers of labyrinthine design, Mozartean melodies awakened me, as flute and harp and violin swirled in and spiralled up a crystal stair. Maidens in Grecian garb danced before me and served me cakes of nectar and dates. Others bore fruit: the luscious pomes and golden plums and clusters of purple grapes.

I heard a discordant sound from below: a picket line paraded up the street. Ugh -- "Men?" I cried, "I thought they all had ceased."

"No, a few survived the War, and with it, their cursed seed."

"But why the signs saying 'Let Women Have the Right of Choice'?"

"Well, it had been a total war, and all men had been drafted, even the elderly, the adolescent, and the handicapped. The women had been drafted into underground war industries which miraculously escaped the foreign atomic blasts. The military installations were hit again and again, and 99% of the men perished. The survivors however were altered hopelessly, like a batch of x-ray-tainted LSD."

"I remember, in the 1970s, something about seed being a suspected carcinogen."

"Yes, precisely so, in a few cases. The neutrons and gamma rays overturned the ratio, not to mention the prevalence of."

"Like Thalidomine, or Rubella?"

"Yes, in epidemic form. Our economy was so shattered that we couldn't properly take care of the wave of helpless creatures. The mentally-sound blind and crippled could be trained and made independent and that we did. As for the others, well, we had to pass a law outlawing the use of sperm."

"But men wouldn't take that lying down--what happened?"

"Long debates in the health and drug departments on the rationale

or irrationale of freedom and the place for altruism in our culture. The gates of necessity are tall and narrow: either freedom to use lethal sperm and the accompanying therapeutic euthanasia for a hopelessly stricken mother, or an acephalic child. Or, prohibiting the deadly reagent."

"That's a dilemma. Like prohibition in the 1920s, or outlawing LSD in the Sixties. The one led to methanol consumption, the other to tain-

ted street drugs, laced with strychnine."

"In this case, there was a division that followed sexual as well as philosophical lines. The men overnight became Objectivists, chanting slogans from Nietzsche and Stirner. 'We men are the strong and heroic sex, and we have the right of choice. Prohibiting procreation is Fascistic and Kommunistic, for we want to do what we have to do, and to Hell with the consequences!'"

"The women, on the other hand, organized the Humanitarian Party and set up secret laboratories in the sites of the former war plants. Seventy years ago, Doctor Rose Nicols had pioneered in the technique of parthenogenesis, and her genius is now bearing fruit."

"Has this been announced?"

"Not yet---it would be prudent not to mention this for the next twenty years, until..."

"Are there any 'Parthings' yet?"

"Look around you---youth, beauty, grace, kindness, benevolence, carefully nurtured in our humanistic culture. We have no rape, no torture, no killings. Now, look out the window."

I saw the granitic faces, the grey-flecked beards, and heard strident

voices: "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom to F---, Right Now!"

"They won't harm us. There's only a dozen of them left, and all well into their seventies. We do give them blankets and food stamps, for we are a merciful race. In twenty more years, this will all pass away."

Her hand stroked my hair above the ears, and she sang me a soft aria from Brahms.

"Alice," I cried.

"Yes, dear, Alice is my name. Alice of a thousand reincarnations, wandering through the ages in search of the love that Time has destined for me."

"But will I have to go back to my former time of existence? For the day has almost passed."

"No, honey, never. For the new indole-ring configuration is for eternity. There is no turning back whatsoeyer."

She enclosed me in her slender arms, as ecstasy engulfed me. Music wafted in, and soft voices, and far-off never-forgotten dreams -- the sweet hymn of Lesbos.

Epistle of the Pagan

By Jae M. Latham

Jessica, Jesse-

Now, perhaps, is not the time to write - is there space enough yet? Could there ever be that space wide and deep enough to comfort our failure? Failure it was, love - the failure of a misplayed duet, a failure to disappoint the crowd that waited so expectantly, that angers the composer who had invested so much, so much hope. Where were our talents? Did they compete so violently? Perhaps it's true, that one must be the instrument, the other the musician. Defying such a dictum, such a solid historical law, we must have defied some god whose peace with all the human race was violated by our sally into fierce and equal loving. May we blame that nameless deity, surely a goddess, who was jealous of our courage? Who took umbrage at our freedom?

As I write I almost see you, through this mist of damned memory, see you stretched lynx-like across the bed, your head propped in the crook of your elbow. I feel the fire-flick of your eyes as they watch me write, consuming the words like some sacrifice the moment they slash across the page. It pleases me, your ready acceptance. It delights me to sense your waiting for the last line, the final line that always draws me close to you. I place the pen into the drawer and my finger-tips are ready for the brush of your skin, trembling to trace the shadowed line of your arched back.

Even now, they are ready for you. It will always be like that, I fear. And my fear gives me strength.

I remember you dancing through the capital, twisting and leaping into the hall, myself slugging behind, still heavy with my unspent words of the day, searching for the phrases that match your art, hungering for the deft turn of line that would still your spin against the backdrop of the Potomac. I was never a woman for dancing, burdened with my pockets full of symbols and images, my thoughtfulness demanding the slow, steady construct

of the architect. But you were a flowing woman whose every move proposed the next, who lifted the body out of bondage to the earth. My body stayed, but my imagination, my gift, moved with you, inside your heart, where I found myself treasured.

Why these musings? Not for bitterness, not nostalgia, not pain unbearable, but pain so rich and full and priceless it burns me into sanctity. You see, loving you has made a saint of me - the scars are holy, wounds that bless my life and transform the writer into mystic. Yes, I have visions ---

Were I an artist, I would quickly, in a fever, translate you onto canvas. How many times, I cannot say. But certainly, my sainthood has made yours, and I would render you Jeanne D'arc, freed of armour, returned to the wood-lonely voices that chant the song of your dance. Power transmuted. Grace and glory now.

--- I need to ask you - as you turn sharply and arch your arms overhead - is it too much grief, knowing me? Ah, but it was never myself alone you knew, but me as I knew you. Was my vision of you so hard to bear - my passion for your grace, your liquid statement of the meshings of the earth? Forgive me, then, for reflecting too much of what you were unaware - that you turned on the axle of the world itself and knew its trembling movements. And I? I delighted in learning them, it was joyful agony - I was befuddled Galileo strangled by the glory of discovery. You read my face, my words and wondered, about power, grace and sanctity.

Forgive, too, in me, the intensity, the winding of my tumbling syllables. The barren years you never saw drove them, shot them to your heart and left the quaking seed of myself there, and in and through your heart I tasted freedom, as promised by the universe, the web of dark and light, beyond the definition of mundane sea and land. And I grew stronger.

This is sin, Jesse, that two mere human beings should grow strong and ripen simply knowing each other. The goddess could allow no more displays of anarchic independence, such disruptive growth in the climate of each other. Or was it, perhaps, that we, losing sight of our horizons, those earthly limits that secured our selves, grew frightened and withdrew. Too strong a taste of the infinite, that exists for each of us, for all of us, if we dare --

So I am a sainted lover, celibate now. For less than you is true obscenity. I shall, perhaps, become a nun---



A Story by Nik

Burning books is against my religion.

There are good and bad books, but there are no good and evil books. Books are the responsibility of the reader. I am not afraid to read **Mein Kampf**, or **The Bible**, or **Atlas Shrugged**. I am not afraid that ideas are going to jump from between the covers and take possession of my behavior. I do not believe that pornography causes men to rape. Or that **Das Kapital** caused a violent revolution.

Books contain right and wrong ideas. It is up to the reader to sort them out and reject the wrong ideas.

Books are good or bad according to how well or how poorly they are written. A good book may contain wrong ideas. A book containing right ideas may be poorly written, and therefore be a bad book.

I do not like to throw any book away. Reading a book of wrong ideas can be a challenge. One must identify and answer all the faulty arguments. Sometimes this can give insight into the thinking and motivation of the "enemy" -- as, for example, the **Anita Bryant Story** or **Conscience of a Conservative**.

Trashy books are interesting culturally. When I read **Love Story**, I made a mental note to remind myself that such is the level of mentality of the average American. Remember that, so I won't be jarred by it.

Pornography is interesting because it sheds light on male sexuality -- though I note that females, and even lesbians, are beginning to produce pornography as part of their (alleged) liberation, so perhaps this, too, is cultural and not a matter of male or female biology at all.

I don't think I have ever thrown a book away unless it was totally falling apart, with pages missing. I find it hard even to give a book away. If I've read it, I'm attached to it, as part of my experience. If I haven't read it, I always think I might want to, it might contain something useful. When I first became a bookdealer, it was hard for me to sell books I hadn't had the chance to read. Much of our inventory found its way into my personal library.

Thus, it shocked me recently when I burned a book.

It was a perfectly good book, in good condition, still wearing the original dustcover. In fact, it had been well cared for and carefully packed and carried around for almost twenty years.

My lover/partner and I closed our bookstore recently. Everything left over after the closing sale went home with us. Alas, the shelves in our new little house were not extensive enough to accommodate our collection. So, the sorting-out process began. Old college textbooks were the first to go (I had majored in psychology--how boring!). My lover's old novels were next--well, maybe not Frank Yerby. Dictionaries were easy (how did we ever accumulate so many dictionaries?). Into the box they went, scheduled for Goodwill, part of twenty boxes in total.

Then there was that one little book, a sweet little book by Joan Walsh Anglund, "Oh, this one's written in," my lover said. I glanced

up and saw it. "Throw it in the fireplace," I ordered.

That really wasn't necessary, I thought, as the pages curled in the flames. I've had other books inscribed to me, and when the inscription no longer held meaning or was a source of embarrassment or unpleasant memories, I cut the page out or pasted a bookplate over the disfiguring inscription.

For half an instant, I wanted to fetch the book back out of the fire. Then a great feeling of bitterness rose in my throat. Quickly, I went back to sorting books and turned my back on my pathetic little inferno.

My lover didn't have to tell me what was written in that book, and I didn't have to look. I can still see the handwriting now, two weeks--no, twenty years later.

It said, "For Nikki, Very muched loved."

The little slip of the pen always annoyed me a bit--I was such a perfectionist. But I used to dwell on every letter, the loop on the "y," the cross on the "F." Does she love me? Am I loved very much(ed)? How much? How?

Friendship Is a Special Way of Feeling, said the title. Is it only friendship? Or is that the same old lesbian euphemism behind which women have been hiding their true relationships for centuries?

I never said the word "lesbian" out loud to her. I was afraid to. Even at twenty-one, she was so young, so untouched, so naive. And she was a Christian.

Not just an ordinary, my-family-always-went-to-church Christian

either. She was a born-again Christian. She had been "saved."

I don't know what ever made me think we had anything in common. In general, I have contempt for Christianity and any other kind of mysticism. In high school, I majored in math and science. The closest I ever came to mysticism was taking a degree in psychology.

When I first heard the story of her conversion to Christianity, I thought she must be nuts. Anyone who hears voices from God has to be nuts. Poor thing, the strain of growing up with hostile parents, the loneliness of being the only budding lesbian in the world, the devastation of feeling rejected and unloved, had gotten to her early. in her adolescence before she was strong enough to cope. "Jesus will take care of you," the voice said to her. And she accepted Christianity wholeheartedly. Wrote letters about it to her friends. Even went to a Christian college. I'll have to be very careful with her, I thought. I wouldn't want to challenge something that a person needs for survival.

When I met her a few months later, however, I didn't feel that way at all. There she was at the bus depot, with suitcases and tennis racquet and more what-all than she could carry, and a big smile for my roommate, whom she had come to visit.

It wasn't love at first sight. I was just very taken with her. Besides, I was already in a relationship of several years standing.

But within a few hours, I knew that I wanted to be her friend. I was very lonely myself, it seems. She had a brilliant mind, a beautiful singing voice, an impish sense of humor, and she was different from anyone I had ever met in my life.

Within a week. I knew that I loved her. It didn't matter how it turned out. I loved her, and I wanted to be her friend. If "friends" was all we could be, I wanted that. And I wanted it for the rest of my life.

In a week, she was gone. Off to her parents. But -- oh, miracle! -she loved me, too! How? I didn't know. But she loved me, and that was enough for then.

She invited me to her parents' home. I went, and we had a short time together. Then, it was back to college in another state, and the long months of correspondence and phone calls began.

I thought I had resolved our religious differences, with very little discussion. She believed in God. 1 believed in Good. We both believed fervently. So, what difference could one "o" make? Perhaps, in a nihilistic society, believers of any kind have more in common than the rest. I feel sure this is what drew me to her. I felt so out of place among jaded bar-dykes, sophisticated sisters of Sapphistry, cynical seducers. I had been there. It wasn't where I had expected to be. I didn't like it. And suddenly, there she was, believing in something with all her being, hating and feeling sorry for all the shallowness and dehumanization in the world. Even though I didn't believe in a God, I thought I understood what that was to her. I thought we shared something in our souls.

"I feel that God sent you to me," she said to me one time. I felt honored and comforted to know that she felt our relationship had the blessing of her highest values, her most fervent belief system.

We talked about love. We agreed that love comes from God (or Good), and since love is good, whatever proceeds from love must also be good. This was the closest we ever came to discussing lesbianism at that time. We were good. We loved each other. Our love was good. That was as far as it went before she had to go away.

In the following months, I faced a moral dilemma. I loved her so much. I wanted her. I wanted to be one with her. I suppose what I wanted was a marriage, but I also wanted more than a marriage. I thought we could be great lovers. We loved the same things. We were creative. We had stimulating discussions for hours when we were together. We came to new insights together. What a meeting of the minds we could have! What a life of intellectual and spiritual growth we could give each other!

At the same time, I wanted what was best for her. Being a lesbian, living a lesbian life, could never be described as easy -- even now. Being a lesbian means going against all of society, separating oneself from the rest of humankind. Being a lesbian means going through life braced for rejection at any time -- from being totally disowned by family to being passed on the street by an acquaintance pretending she didn't see you. Being a lesbian means taking a risk that some arrogant and homophobic policeman may someday catch you in a situation where you are in violation of a law, any law, and your transgression can be used as an excuse for him to subject you to abuse and insult. Being a lesbian means taking your entire career in your hands, all your hopes and ambitions and aspirations, and putting them up for ransom for the sake of love.

And being a lesbian means that society does not recognize your right to protect and defend the one person who means more to you than the whole world. Lesbian lovers have to go it alone. They have to be together, but independent, need each other but be self-sufficient, help each other but be able to take care of themselves in a scrape.

Thus, a nagging doubt kept preying on my conscience. When we were together at her parents' home, she had mentioned that she had been engaged to a boy in college. She had wanted to tell me about it, but I had shushed her because I didn't want to hear about someone else during our brief time together.

Back home again, I started wondering about it. I didn't even know whether she was a lesbian, or should be. Who was this boy? Why had they broken up? How did she feel about it? Would she, could she become engaged again?

The question came down to, could this young woman whom I

loved so deeply be happy in a heterosexual marriage?

And if she could, would it be right of me, in the name of love, to attempt to persuade her to enter a life of pseudo-matrimony with me?

Love is naturally protective. The last thing a lover wants to do is cause harm to her beloved. Hurting someone you love is like driving a dagger into your own heart. When you truly love someone, you can no longer separate her pain from your pain, her well-being from your well-being, her happiness from your happiness.

I suppose all these feelings were enhanced by the fact that she was so inexperienced. I had never been first for anyone at that time, and I had always vowed that if I ever was, I would take it as a great responsibility. My own early experiences of being kicked around in "gay life" underscored my resolve. We were only two years apart in age, but I felt a hundred years older in sordid experience. I loved her. I wanted to protect her. I loved her so much, I would even protect her from myself, if that seemed the right thing to do.

But first I had to know. Could she be heterosexual? If she could be, I vowed, I would give up my hope of a lesbian love-relationship and resolve to be her platonic friend.

Months went by, we wrote to teach other daily of this and that. A book we had read. A poem we liked. Progress in school. Music we were listening to. And my soul-searching went on. And my wondering just how she did feel about me. She loved a lot of people. She loved humanity. Did she love me, or was she in love with me?

Being apart was a terrible trial. Our time together had been so short. We barely had time to get acquainted, to enjoy each other. Our relationship had not progressed beyond a few intimacies. We longed to be together, and we were more than a thousand geographical miles apart. Worse, we had responsibilities. We were both in college. We had to study and write papers and take exams and still make a living somehow.

Letters were not enough, nor phone calls. And our distance was creating misunderstandings, along with our natural reluctance to discuss intimate matters by mail. Add to this the reticence caused by my trepidations about the future and my fear of shocking or repelling her by too much frankness about my own feelings.

Finally, I asked her in a letter to tell me about the boy in college, her former fiance. I thought I was prepared to hear. She wrote me back in detail, telling me of her love for him, of nuzzling her face in his jacket-sleeve during walks in the snow, of his being a daily part of her life for years, of his being there during her illness, and of her inability to realize fully and accept the fact that she would never be his wife and have his children. It was what I had wanted to know. But it was more than I had wanted to hear. I couldn't bear it, after all. I broke down.

I remember calling her. I was upset. She was frightened, didn't

know what was wrong. I tried to explain, but I was sobbing. I had just lost the hope of a love that meant more to me than anything I had ever experienced in my life. I was unconsolable. Something was broken.

She didn't understand, what did her past engagement have to do with us? She did have those feelings for me, why was I upset? It was Thanksgiving break. She tried to find a way to be with me for a few days, but gave it up as unfeasible. The distance was too great, the time was too short, and neither of us had any money.

I wish I could say that when we saw each other again, we talked things over and came to an understanding and our difficulties were removed and we loved each other and lived happily ever after.

On the contrary, everything went from bad to futile. We continued to correspond, but there was a feeling of estrangement in everything we wrote and said and did.

It was my fault, I suppose, because I think I lost faith in our love. I had had a sense of destiny about meeting her and loving her. From things she wrote and said, I think she felt the same. One time she had written me that she felt I had been growing in her all her life and that she had just gotten around to naming me "Nikki." But she had also written to me that she felt that God had sent her the boy in college, her fiance. God has been very busy, I said to myself bitterly.

No. She loved him. And she still loved him and wanted to be married to him. And there was no room in my scheme of things to feel that way about two people concurrently -- or in this case, even consecutively. No serial monogamy for me. I had never felt that way about anyone before, and if she had, then it couldn't be real. The wonderful feeling was gone. The elation dissipated, the soaring spirit grounded.

She came to see me for Christmas vacation. We spent a few days at her parents' home, the rest of the week at my house. Everything was wrong. We didn't know how to greet each other. We had arguments. We slept together. It was a total failure. Totalling abandoning my resolve to deliver her over to straight life, I asked her to "marry" me. She said she would. I must have been insane. I think I frightened her. Our intensity had brought us together -- "crashing" -- and now that there was separateness, the intensity of our personalities was driving us further and further apart.

I don't understand anything that happened after that Christmas visit. I know everything was pretty bad. I was still in love with her, but we couldn't seem to get along. I told myself it was just the wrong time. I still wanted to be with her. I thought things would work out when we could finally be together, live together, with no more suspense, no more separation, no more opportunity for misunderstanding and pain.

I don't know what she felt or truly thought from that point on. When she went back to college, she wrote me a long letter in a greeting card. The card bore a picture of a man and woman done in needlework. The caption on the back read, "Husband and Wife." Was this a message, or was it the only card she happened to have around? I hoped for the best.

One day, I got a letter saying she might join the Peace Corps. I felt sick. Here I was, working toward the day we could be together, and she was contemplating going to South America. "I have to be prepared to go wherever God sends me," she explained.

A few weeks later, she wrote that God didn't want us to be together, after all. At least, not as lovers. She still loved me, of course. And I would be welcome to come where she was.

Taking her at her word, I went to see her during spring vacation. She was glad to see me, we slept in the same bed, and she avoided intimacy like the plague.

By summer, I think she really didn't want me around at all. But I quit my job and went where she was. I have to try and I have to see, I told myself, because if I don't go, I will always wonder whether it might have been different if only I had been there. It didn't take very long. She hardly saw me the whole time I was there. The few times we were alone, she acted like I was trying to molest her if I even made a move. Things were that bad. I came home.

I'll never forget that fall semester after I had lost her. My cousin tried to commit suicide (later succeeding). My best friend, whom I hadn't seen in four years, was killed in an auto accident the weekend she was coming to see me. And everyone was buying bomb shelters or leaving town because of the Cuban missile crisis. Somehow, through that sheer determination that sometimes arises when things can't possibly get any worse, I survived and got straight A's in school. I went on to get my degree.

Once I knew it was hopeless, I went on to other relationships. From time to time, I thought about spending my life in priestly celibacy, out of respect for my unilateral commitment to her. To tell the truth, it looked for a long time as though I might as well be celibate because as long as I was in love with her, I couldn't muster anything more than warm caring or momentary passion for anyone else; and while I was able to make love, I couldn't respond. I never lied to anyone about it. My lovers knew I was in love with her. I always wondered why they wanted to be with somebody who had so little to offer.

Eventually, I did see her again. Even had overnight visits from time to time. Good friends. The feelings were still there, I couldn't help it. One of the last times I saw her, I had put my jacket on and was ready to leave. She came up to me and buttoned my top button and smoothed my lapels. And I looked down at her freckled face and into her blue eyes and thought, Oh, damn you, how long is this going to last?

That was after about six years.

I finally talked myself out of it. I went over all the things we had

argued about, the differences in our view of life and our priorities. I thought about the differences in our way of thinking, of forming conclusions. I told myself that the moral fervor which had brought us together had no real substance, our moral values were really quite opposite. I guess it worked, because I have been able to have deep relationships since then. But it is really hard to give up someone you love. Because in order to give up the person, you have to give up the love. And the love is based on something, on something you believe in and value. And giving up something you believe in is akin to amputating a hand, a wrist, an arm, or a heart. The only way out was to convince myself that we didn't really believe in the same things. Her God and my Good were not the same, after all. And that must really be true, or we could not have reached such a painful impasse.

Later, I even wondered whether the difficulties of the relationship made it seem more desirable. Much in the manner of yearning for the unattainable. Or the way that lesbians I have known always seem to have more trouble getting over the "one that got away." Maybe, I have thought, if we had actually lived together and had the relationship, I might have fallen out of love or gotten tired of her or been disillusioned with her inevitable faults. I'll never know. And I'll never know why she left me. And not knowing doesn't even drive me crazy anymore.

One residue that is left is a distrust of close friendships with Christians and other mystics. Not to stereotype, I hope. And it has nothing to do with my lack of belief in God. That stems strictly from my lack of belief in anything supernatural.

But it really bugs me when I hear a Christian say, God told me to do this or I had a revelation or I really feel God is leading me in this direction or I have placed my life in the hands of God or I am carrying out God's Will, etc. It bugs me because it is an abnegation of responsibility. It is passing the buck.

Life would have been simpler, I think, if she had ever once said, Nikki, I just don't love you anymore or I have fallen in love with someone else or I was really disillusioned by our miserable time together or I have decided you are a real creep, etc.

Christians are confusing, with all their vague talk about love and God's Will and wanting you to live in your true humanity.

I wish she would have said I want or I don't want. Then I could have dealt with it better.

I would have known right away that Nikki wasn't Very muched loved. I could have cut the page out of that book and sent it along to Goodwill years ago. And I wouldn't have ended up ordering a book burning -- which is, after all, against my religion.

By Johnie Staggs

I feel that if I were a sculptor, I could mold a perfect likeness...how well I know every line, every expression, every gesture...Alas! I am not able to mold clay in the image of my love -- so my pen must paint a picture...

Where shall I begin? That is very difficult, you see, for my love is the very essence of perfection to each and every one of my senses. Nothing has ever pleased my vision, as has the sight of my love...No sound has ever brought such joy to my ears, as has the voice of my love...No scent has ever brought such pleasure to my nose, as the aroma of my love...Never did my sense of touch have any meaning, until I touched my love...My sense of taste must have been limbo, before knowing my love...

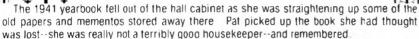
Maybe a perfect beginning for a written portrait of my love should begin with the hands...for these are the key to many of the facets of my love — at last I am glad this is written and not just a picture — How could you ever see? These hands that are strong and sure, yet gentle, and yes, sometimes hesitant...these hands that bring forth music from the piano that quickens your heart and caresses your soul...these hands that bring forth words from a typewriter that may shake the world...these hands that can hold and use tools so adeptly — you never wonder how (just when)...these hands that can draw a picture so real that you aren't sure - could it be a photograph?...these hands that hold me and assure me that I am!...In many, many ways, these hands hold my world!

Next in my picture must come the head — for here is the mind that possesses all the knowledge that is my love. Here are the eyes that behold all that is beautiful. They are beautiful, dark, and deep. Sometimes they brood with such sadness that tears fall from my eyes. Sometimes they are so angry, they burn like hot coals, and then I am filled with such a sense of desolation. Sometimes they sparkle like stars after a storm has cleared the air. And sometimes they are so mellow and filled with love, that I am weak. These eyes of my love are truly the barometer of my life.



The Late Bloomer

by Bernice Ballour



She had gone to a junior college that year before transferring to the university. She was not quite eighteen years old, shy and awkward, convinced that she was too tall, too thin, too unsophisticated, too undesirable to ever make a successful social adjustment. Now, thirty years later, although her life had radically changed, she knew she had never completely lost the bittersweet feelings of that first year spent away from home. She knew, because as she opened the yearbook and looked at some of the forgotten yet still strangely familiar faces, she felt a sadness, profound and mystifying, signifying desires never to be realized, never even to be understood.

She turned to the "r's" and found the picture she was looking for--Jeanne Rydel's Jeanne was a nineteen-year-old sophomore, an all-around girl--and Pat's idol in those days. She looked at the small write-up above Jeanne's picture: "The perfect photographer's model Priceless smile. Sweet disposition. Student par excellence Beauty has not dimmed her naturalness and sincerity."

Then Pat read what Jeanne had written to her: "Patty--it was so nice knowing you. You sure were okay on the basketball court.--Jeanne."

Pat smiled wryly at that, for basketball had scarcely been the greatest of her achievements. Jeanne was on the first team, of course, because everything she did she did well. Pat made the second team by virtue of being tall and a fairly good forward. She remembered that last game of the season when their team was so far ahead, the second team (minus official uniforms) finally got to play. When she made an unexpected basket (her first) in the few minutes she was on the floor, she saw Jeanne in her orange and green uniform, sitting there on the bench cheering her. Others were cheering wildly too, but Pat only remembered Jeanne.

"Hey. Mom!" Pat quickly closed the yearbook, hearing her longhaired teenage son's voice, thinking how much he sounded like his father.

"I'm here. Billy. Cleaning out the cabinet."

"Hey, okay if I go swimming today at Jed's?"

"All right, but be back by five. Your dad wants an early dinner tonight. Do you know where Arlene is?"

Yeah, she rode her bike over to the shopping center. She'll be back in a few minutes. Hey, will you fix me a sandwich or something before I go?"

"How about in half an hour? Your sister should be back then, and I'll fix you both some lunch."

"Okav.

Again. Pat opened the yearbook and flipped through the pages. America had not yet become involved in the second World War, and life on campus was comfortably shielded and just a bit unreal. In view of the international climate, the students were debating

whether German would be a more "practical" language than French--and also whether President Roosevelt would really keep us out of the war. Love songs--songs like "Stardust" and "I'll Never Smile Again"--still blared from the jukeboxes, while boys and girls danced cheek to cheek in the Coke 'n' Smoke Shoppe. The girls wore skirts and sloppy sweaters and saddle shoes, and the boys, with extremely short hair or crewcuts, invariably sported letterman sweaters or rough tweed jackets. A few of the more sophisticated smoked pipes and sneaked beer into their rooms.

One night a few of the girls in Pat's off-campus house whispered that they were going to an off-limits roadhouse where whiskey was served. Out of politeness, they extended a half-hearted invitation to Pat, and since it was a Friday night with little activity on campus, she decided to join them.

"Will Jeanne Rydel be there?" she had asked hopefully.

The girls all laughed. "Not very likely," one of them answered. "She'd be eaten alive!"

They walked about two miles to reach their destination, and Pat sensed instinctively upon entering the roadhouse that she'd made a mistake. The atmosphere was unpleasant, noisy and crowded, the air smelling heavily of liquor and cigarettes. The first concrete thing she noticed was a huge dartboard on the wall, and there throwing the darts was one of the popular church-going boys from the campus. He was stoned.

For lack of something better to do, Pat picked up a dart and tossed it at the board. Eventually everyone was laughing at her because she was nervous and her aim was poor. Amidst the laughter she heard voices buzzing near her and, turning, saw that Lucy Porter, one of the girls who had accompanied her, was talking to a lanky blond boy with a glass in his hand, and pointing to her. The boy emphatically shook his head, and Pat flushed, realizing that her friend apparently had been trying to get her a date for the evening.

"Won't you even dance with her?" Pat overheard.

Again, the boy shook his head.

"But she never gets to go dancing--"

"I'm aware of that," the boy said, as he placed his glass on the bar and pulled Lucy onto the dance floor.

Pat bravely threw darts for the remainder of the evening while her friends danced and giggled with the boys they had picked up.

At close to midnight, one of the boys gave all of them a ride home. Lucy and lanky blond sat up front French-kissing. When Pat finally did get back to her off-campus house, she went to the bathroom and promptly threw up. Everyone assumed she had been drinking. Pat vowed she would never again venture off campus for such dubious "pleasures"...

She looked at herself now in the hall mirror. Aside from the graying hair her face was surprisingly youthful and attractive for a woman pushing fifty. Ben was not the only man who had noticed her. When she finally began to blossom and come out of her shell--she was in her late twenties then--she had been swamped with dates and invitations. When she went dancing, she seldom sat out a single number. Like the heroine in an old fairy tale, she had run the gamut from ugly duckling to princess charming.

What had she done? Nothing spectacular, really, but a host of little things that apparently made all the difference: some needed dental work, proper hair styling and makeup, a new wardrobe that was becoming to her, some added pounds in the right places. Perhaps, too, she had begun to have a different kind of personality, one borne of confidence rather than inferiority.

Yes, she had changed. The traumatic experience of that night in the roadhouse was

long dead and buried. Her life was about as exemplary and normal as a life could be. Yet, sometimes in the still of night, the gnawing questions would come to her--questions that tore into her privacy and made her search her innermost thoughts. She had lived almost half a century, yet she still wasn't sure what she wanted. She only knew she was not happy, merely resigned.

She loved Ben and the children, of course, yet her marriage and family life lacked something vital. They were not really close as a family--perhaps that was the trouble. There were too many underlying tensions which had prevented her from reaching her children, especially since they had grown up. Ben still cared for her, she knew, and Pat still felt something for him--but somehow it wasn't enough for either of them. Their sex life had fallen off drastically. Ben did not seem terribly concerned, but she felt unfulfilled as a person.

Had her "other life" really been so miserable? Weren't there certain satisfactions then which she no longer had? She turned a few more pages in the yearbook until she came to a group picture of the college newspaper staff. She had been a reporter for the paper, and a good one. Because she wasn't popular with boys in those days, she spent her spare time alone in her room writing articles and stories, or perhaps reading a Sinclair Lewis novel or listening to the radio. Later at the university, she had majored in journalism. Her work had always been terribly important to her, yet Pat had given it up quite willingly after her marriage. In those days a woman did not gain prestige through a joband Ben's teaching career came first.

She turned back to the sophomore pictures in the yearbook, and looked again at Jeanne. "Patty--it was so nice knowing you..."

Pat had wanted to know Jeanne better--much better--but had never entertained even the remotest hope that this would come to pass. She was too much a loner, too introverted, while Jeanne was one of the gang, popular with girls and boys alike. Pat remembered that Jeanne had tied with Sharon Williams for ''most beautiful girl on campus'' in the popularity contest, but in Pat's eyes Jeanne was superior in every way. Sharon came from a wealthy family in a large city and tended to be patronizing and far too conscious of her assets. Jeanne, however, who lived in a modest home in the small town where the college was located, had a refreshing air of simplicity about her, a total lack of conceit, an unawareness of her power.

She remembered the initiation for the Orange and Green athletic club. Pat was one of six freshmen who received an invitation to join the club by virtue of her good athletic record for the year. Pat felt very proud of her accomplishment and very excited about the forthcoming initiation. If she felt any fear at all, it was a pleasantly delicious fear. For, after all, wouldn't Jeanne be there?

And she was. Pat saw her very clearly in her mind's eye. She was smiling at Pat, holding the spoon with the bitter concoction for her to swallow. Pat had swallowed it all right--to this day she didn't know what it was--and would have swallowed a thousand more spoonfuls if Jeanne had told her to. After all the hazing was finished, they had gone to the Coke Shoppe where the initiates sat together at a large table and received their letters--small metal letters to be worn on a chain. Then amidst the galety of the evening,

Jeanne had to leave, and Pat's heart sank, unaware that the most glorious moment of all was to come--when she'd felt Jeanne's hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

"You're a swell sport, Patty." she'd said just before departing for the evening. Pat had looked up at her with worshipful eyes, but she knew even then that Jeanne had never noticed and would never even think of her in the years ahead...

They were years of change for Pat--years of growing, of learning, of searching for some elusive happiness. After graduating from the university, she was hired as a reporter for a community newspaper with a circulation of 30,000. The work helped her in overcoming her shyness. She joined social clubs and church groups in a determined effort to meet men and lead a "normal" life. She had affairs, of course, none of them very exciting, the physical relationships being neither distasteful nor particularly enjoyable. When she was being terribly honest with herself, she had to admit that some of her friendships with women were more satisfying to her emotionally. Occasionally she would meet a girl she liked, someone who evoked a memory of Jeanne, but quickly she would push the idea from her mind. These were the 1940s when respectable young women got married and had children.

So there was no real relationship with anyone, male or female, until Ben came along in the fall of 1952 when her metamorphosis was complete. She was taking an adult class in American literature, as much out of general interest as to meet people, while Ben was boning up for the high school English classes he taught. Shyly, almost like a high school boy himself, he had asked to take her home after they'd known each other a few weeks.

Only one who was blind could have failed to sense his deep attraction to her. She wasn't quite sure of her own feelings though. She liked him, she found him pleasant and companionable--but love was something else.

She couldn't help remembering what a girl friend once had said to her. "No matter how nice a guy is, you've got to be attracted to him if you're considering marriage. Remember--night must fall!"

"I don't know, Ben. I honestly don't know," she admitted when, after knowing each other about six months, he'd asked if she cared about him.

As with other men in the past, her sexual relationship with Ben, although frequent, was not especially satisfying. Only on rare occasions did she experience orgasm.

"I'm very serious," he'd told her. "I'm thinking about us--about getting married."

But she simply couldn't make up her mind, and finally Ben had lost patience with her and suggested they break off their relationship. They decided to meet one last time for dinner at a cafeteria located midway between his school and her newspaper office.

Pat wasn't quite sure just what it was that brought her to a decision that night. Perhaps it was the way he walked, the familiar clothes he wore, his sensitive eyes and the way he looked at her. Whatever it was, she didn't know--but something about this man had touched her and made it impossible for her to say goodbye. It wasn't a passionate love, she knew, but he had awakened something in her that she didn't want to lose. Later, she understood the basis for their relationship. Ben had needed her, whereas other men had simply wanted her. Essentially, her husband was a loner as she once had been, and therein lay the foundation for their rapport.

But how odd, how terribly strange that in all their years together she had never experienced the thrill and joy that came one night long ago when she felt Jeanne's hand on her shoulder. . . .

"Hey, Mom, what are you doing?" As if in a dream, she heard her son's impatient voice. Then, quickly returning to the present, she answered him. "I'm still here, Billy. Cleaning out the cabinet."

"You said you'd fix us some lunch. Arlene's home now."

"Oh. yes. I'll be right there." Carefully, she slipped the yearbook between an old photograph album and a scrapbook labeled "Our Wedding." Then she locked the cabinet door.

An Afterthought on Stardom

(Following the defeat of gay rights in San Jose)

Lam half of a media image created by publicity promoted by reporters pursuing a good story

Lam ink on highly disposable newsprint invisible electrons cascading thru a picture tube

I am a press release and a statement to the media and a half-tone photo on page 8B

I am half of a lesbian couple
fighting for civil rights
for anonymous gay people
so they can take heart
and maybe come out
to a parent
or a colleague

I am half of a cause, half of an idea that never quite made it thru the tube

or a friend

I am a person sacrificing my identity
so I can become half a media image
presented to the amorphous public
in the vain hope that someday
I can be a person with an identity
living in and creating my own world

without fear.

-- Nikki



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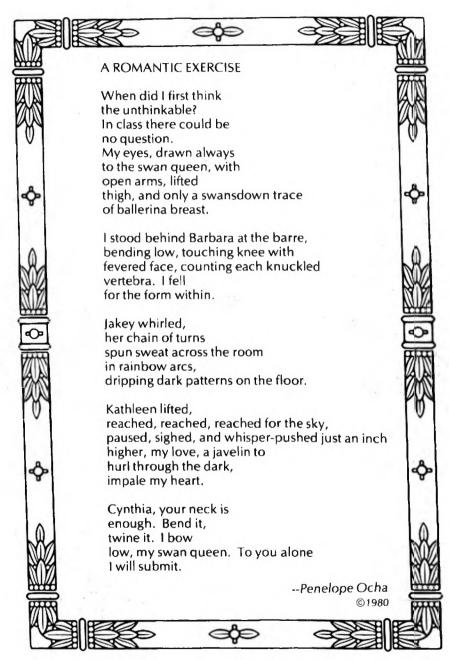
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28





THE AFTERNOON OF OUR AFFAIR

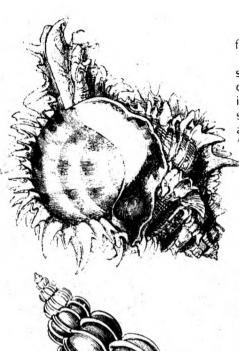
What have I got for you today? Some words, a taste of bitter herbs, a resilient wall where you can bounce your opinions?

How about a vision shared, a critical sense, my knife-edged tongue to hew and carve you into just proportions?

Some days I bring the desert with shifting sand, burning sun of scorn, and no promise of even brackish water.

Shall it be Beethoven with storm, winds that rage and moan and tear, a deluge to drown us both?

What I wish to give is the mountain meadow, vast, bosomy, flower dotted, brook-watered, a place in peace to loaf and touch our souls.



favor

some internal thunder or hollow of air or pressure inside me sinks, swells like a wave and descends on your answer "I have seen him again"

> placing my packages on the table between us i am distracted by eternal sinking and swelling asking the question receiving reply

(i stand in the bottom of a deep boat and your words are a muffled sea sound at my feet and sides distant and echoing outside the hum in my head)

you are mumbling about love as i turn the parcel of tea in my numb hand reading "pekoe" and "orange" with each silent turn

> i am afraid of my questions afraid i might speak them afraid i might not and you will never cease your stupid explaining

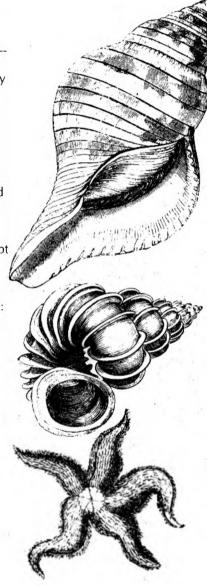
(i had screamed hoarse and still sinking so distant i shoved my fist straight through the window glass and not even my bloody forearm was valid like my waterless drowning) i feel your next confession coming so i prevent its arrival with one sudden jerk of my headi know you so well there is no comfort in this honesty give me a gentler revelation between these sharp glass ones let me breathe let me harden and rue

> if this triangle favored my gender i could fight on firm ground and righteous betrayed absolved by tradition let my poisons by rote with no resigning dull doubt

(the images are abrupt shards ebb and flow on a sea uncontrollable and piercing cold: the unmade bed your attentive guilt smile a brown flat chest. i am not in my element. land-locked i would grind pieces of you both into glittering dust on a pavement)

i turn words carefully in my mind choosing for cruelty and coarseness bite and wince holding them ready for designed pain

it is when you ask me what i'm thinking that i will spit them at you ignoring your innocence forgiving my love and crushing us both with my new-shod heart.



--kathryn t. adams

That bridge has been relinquished,
left to its own ruin:
a mourning bridge held up
by foggy pillars,
connected by tenuously riveted moments
that loosen and break apart, finally to fall
into a thousand delusory columns: smashed.

This is my past, evacuated.
Now I must attempt to supplant it.

That bridge has been preserved, shielded from the rusting air:
You pace the coppery edge.
You clutch the flimsy wires.
You pivot from girder to girder.

This is your version of our past, restored by the letters I send, like the smallest of nails to your confinement.

Now you temporarily rebuild.

For me, that bridge has crumbled & sunk into the Pacific.

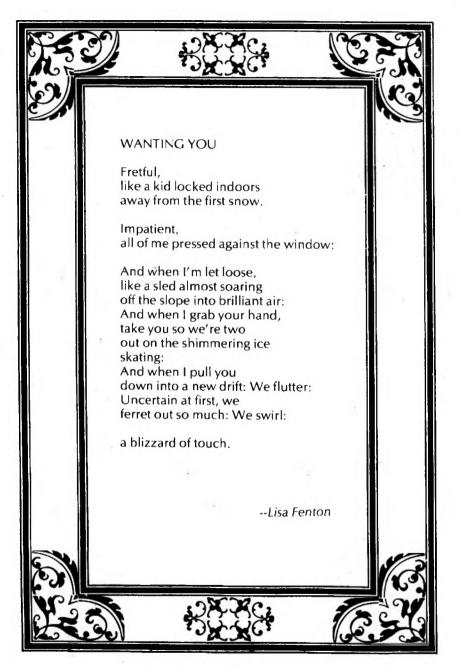
I will make another to take me where I wish to go.
But if I look on some summer night, I will see you there:

someone obsessed with mending a bridge they can never hope to cross.

-- Lisa Fenton









IN A BOX

she used to live in a box very high on a shelf "vou are a girl" they said inside very cold "frigid" she was told frightened protected labeled destined (doomed) painfully nakedly she emerged from the box less than sane but not yet dead ignorant

of the struggle that lay ahead but her struggle allowed her

to grow

"on hold"

gain change freedom
she maintained thoughts and actions
with strong force
and great energy
she performed only with awareness
or not at all
she made love a direct experience
with life itself
without putting love

she learned not to expect anything of others but to be in touch with their right to be

she unfolded the full potential of her mind through education from within

but she never forgot that she used to live

in a box

--Zee

QUEEN & DRONE

Hive of our life together: A cloud of bees take residence for the night:

No lights on, a flat rumbling, spent stingers scattered through your house.

I sit up smoking, sweating the summer out, waiting for our season to change. It always has before: Yearly, her depleted flowers eventually yield another feast, Then, honey flows.

Cool, complacent Queen summons: "What is due a drone?"

One is no more favored than the rest not even the token place next to her nest.

Her calls: seductive as the sweetness she grew fat and loved on:
The harvest almost all consumed.

Hive of hungry love: She releases rations that still must be bargained for: daily dues I can no longer afford to pay a whore of the heart.

Starved,
I leave my cell of rebellion,
the waiting, the walls.
Starved,
but not yet wingless--no, not yet wingless,
I escape. Yes I escape
the lethal machinery
of loving you.

--Lisa Fenton





THEVIAL

The vial you gave me shattered. You blessed it tenderly, with oils and herbs: a secret recipe. You blessed it for these coins I use to throw the changes. Tomorrow I'll bury the vial but I'll keep the coins. They've been used to tell so many stories and the stories are so old. The same stories have been told for years about the same changes. Still, whenever the changes happen, like now, there's a part of me that doesn't want to hear those stories. There's a part of me that doesn't want to accept the changes, or to acknowledge that I've caused them to happen. Tomorrow when I bury the vial, I'll think about how we were when you blessed it: shiny and smooth as a new coin. I'll remember how clear the glass was and how sweet the oils and herbs smelled when I first opened the vial. It will always seem ironic that the last time I used it, I asked the coins about us: How could such a smooth, sweet friendship change? The Book of Changes told me an old story about joy between friends, joy like twin lakes which is taken for granted and so it changes, it evaporates and becomes the wind and moves on. The vial's gone; with it goes the sweetness, the oils and herbs, your special blend: a secret recipe.

--Jesse Mavro

ALL I NEEDED TO KNOW

You were better than poetry and more mysterious.

Your kisses were

sweeter than honey more potent than wine better than chocolate

like gossamer angel wings tickling my mouth.

You were silent Your eyes said nothing They made no promises But, O. your trembling mouth

searching out mine told me all I needed to know.





KRLIK ELIZ

IAMAICA IS HER LOVE

She grows soft and the grace Of her dream widens to a gesture Up toward a hillside on an island To somewhere real Jamaica is her love, she shows me. And into the green her hands carry her To the houses of split bamboo Toward the sound of somebody's violin There to reveal this island's aura Built to the drums and her song Which sways her not akin to any lover And unlike most dreams of a home Jamaica completes her poetry Her journey is not soliloguy For she stretches delighted Away from this other place quickly Land with no green harbors That always wants to steal her bow Land that cannot move her For lamaica woos her: listen Her voice cradles a seawinded green Jamaica is her love.

-- Laura Koplewitz 1/6/79





As Rare as Contentment

By Rochelle Dubois

Death is the mother of beauty: hence from her alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams and our desires. --Wallace Stevens

I've come to a conclusion, as I sit here at Sylvia's bureau with the accouterments of her magic strewn before me. That is, stars don't point anywhere. Her make-up on ornate tray as though she were an actress or a model. Tubes of frosted blush, ultra sapphire eyeshadow, powder compact reflect in the mirror. A sword pin stands upright over the silver chain of a slave bracelet inscribed in Arabic. Under the faded lace cloth, rain-smeared letter stamped from Fiji, the cowrie shell half-peeled off. Beyond night, yet too early for morning. I rouse suddenly as though I hear the empty pages of my journal scream from the pain of silence, or perhaps the memory of a wound not yet inflicted.

"There was no gradual transition. It was deep sleep one minute, then complete, alert wakefulness the next. Not only I had a certainty that Sylvia was there too and some difficulty convincing myself that eyes and reason were not playing false, or whether I had been dreaming of her? I don't know, I have no recollection of doing so. It was rather an uncanny feeling, and I wonder if something particular happened to her. There was a pleasant sense of contentment that she was near. Nothing quite like this has happened before, and I've never had so much difficulty persuading myself that what I knew to be true was in fact true.

"If I could express myself...if I were Alicia...'Whoever touched Sylvia at midnight...did she wish a fire start to burn inside him slow like a snakian fuse ignited at dusk, not melting volcanic bright until flame vanished with the act of eruption?' Last night, her black silky hair spread out like a geisha fan on pillows of satin snow. In her

negligee, emerald-green, like the island landscape, lush. I gave her the gown on her last birthday. We were always exchanging gifts, clothes, jewelry, poems, secrets, from the very first time we met. Like a child, her skin so smooth, and through the sheer netweb curtains, a slant of moonlight casting her fair brow in luminous innocence. So pure, so gentle, sleeping peacefully like a flesh doll dipped in pearlescent preservative..."

.

"Sylvia brought the candle close to the tip of her nose so the flame could warm her. I wanted her to bring it nearer to me, so it could melt away the memory, the reason for my being here, in this room, in this Otrantan castle. 'Sylvia, my flesh is heavy on my bones, my shadow droops.' I am not Alicia. I do not have her gift. I am not a poet. I hear you describe our island in the gloom of a city cloaked in sooted garments of ermine and slush. Thirty-seven miles southwest of Sint Marten, there is another Caribbean island whose total area is less than eight square miles. It is not known to tourists, because people on the other two Dutch Windward Islands say "there is nothing there" on Statia, which is the nickname for Sint Eustatius... Fly here! We need to see each other as soon as possible. When we are together, I have the idea we communicate quite well: even that words are not always necessary. But writing I sometimes wonder...If I live to be 100. I won't forget the night on the veranda when we first met...' Letters like the travel posters she composed, like captions underneath scenic photographs. 'The island is not so very foggy, like the fogs you see in films which are usually to create a sinister effect, and of course are made to order. I should not think there are more than a couple of thick fogs each year, and a really thick one every few years I'm told. The temperature is now 70° and there is a strong easterly wind blowing and raising a short sea. But you must see for yourself...'"

.

Outside, there is no other sound but the surf, the lapping of the waves against the sand, and sometimes a ghost in the shroud of sailboat afloat in the horizon creeps toward the jutting cove. The wind has carried more than one spirit through the crevices in the cliffs, shadows stretching to touch our island, to come back to haunt familiar forests in a temporal clime. Soon Tomas will come, that sly smiling fisherman, with his butterfly net and baiting questions. I will have to tell him that you are probably collecting shells or seaweed. "She should be careful of the jellyfish in the sand," he will say. I will nod in accord for the hundredth time, weary of the endless explanations. How like a child ballerina, my

fragile Sylvia, whirling in the green negligee before the mirror and the moon.

"The descriptions of concrete images are what I must seize upon now. The candleholder, about two inches deep measured by thumb and slightly larger than a half dollar in roundness. It fit in the palm of her hand comfortably. Underneath, the clay stamped MADE IN SUVA. Rotating the candle slowly, now bringing the flame closer to those long eyelashes. Hesitating, sniffing the scent of lemon, spilling out a drop from the pool of life to see wax fall over the rim of the taper, settle momentarily along the side, then solidify, each drop creating a new shape. But how insensitive is the form. There is no flowing, no translucence, no feeling. Sylvia dipped her little finger into the liquid. Before she could remember the heat from the fire, another teardrop of wax coated her flesh. (What is Alicia's appeal? Do her words float like flower petals in Tomas' wash basin? The gift of tongue -- her voice like a dream? Her letters transparent, penned on onionskin.)

"'Am I wax?' I turn to the black wick to repeat your question. The yellow blob falls in one piece on the page of my book. With the edge of my thumbnail, I split the form in two, in three. I remold it. I bisect it again. A shape I have never seen before."

.

Now it is completely gone. No wax, no scent, no trace of our ever having gone through that past foolish action, of me ever imagining...Outside, the eyes of the waves -- such moons belong to the dreams hidden by rich aristocratic ladies in antique wooden bureau drawers. But the ears of the waves. And the voices, the echo of Alicia's poem shattering my illusion, my peace of mind, my vengeful dreams. But I have not always listened to the ocean in such seclusion. I mean we. Seclusion...

"What is this distinction between cultures? I like him, that's all," Sylvia whispered, as though addressing the candle. "We have never thought of marriage. We are no more than good friends. Can I not choose my own friends? Must they bear the seal of your approval?" Her tone became less harsh. "This is a short candle. We must not use it up too soon. There is still much to the night. We will need light again." She blew out the candle, and I shut my book.

"I can sleep with my eyes open or shut," I said. "When there is no light, there are no shadows to play havoc with one's power to concentrate on sleep."

"There are always shadows." That smile, that enigmatic smile admonishing the island's apparitions. "Come to sleep, Shadows."

Then you would tell me of *her*. "An Alice in search of wonderland, she did not at first impress me. Squirming in the cushion chair and twirling round her finger a strand of ecru hair, Alicia distinctly disturbed me. Until I heard her read." Your letter is beside me now, Sylvia. I always carry two or three to reread. I try to understand your labyrinthian mind; perhaps I try too hard.

"They were not words that spilled off her tongue; they were threads of silk. She lifted us all to Olympus with Icarus case. "The Poetess" she read; the poetess she was. With every line of chameleon verse, we were with her, as she became the hollow of a valley, the cradle of a tree, the little dipper of the night. Her breathy voice was April; she modestly bit her lip at unconscious pauses. A sculptress with language, she cut life and molded harmony...' "I took your word. Sylvia, I read your letters to me. To me your words and thoughts about Alicia...

.

"So still you are in sleep, my dear, gentle Sylvia. Yet as a star still, your radiance so penetrates the dark inside me, and I quiver in my desire to grasp, to seize a long, slender silhouette. To grasp invisible reality, the essence of a wish. How in vain we continue to desire!

"I recall the first time we met, how many summers ago?...We were both younger then. Not that we are old now, although I am older than Sylvia. Only thirty, and yet she is more venerable than the Papeete woman who came to us yesterday morning with her shoulders so sloped and her face worn with the strain of seeing the seasons pass through many generations. Mari will come again with her youngest grandchild this morning to take tea with us, but I will tell her Sylvia is still sleeping, or that she has gone with Tomas for the mail. Sylvia's glassy eyes like grey clamshell secrets glisten more brightly than the deep blue eyes belonging to that other naked child. To think, we are practically secluded in this castle, on this island with only Mari, Tomas, and a few other natives and the mailboat that comes every other Saturday. That same mailboat which must have carried away Sylvia's letters, and brought Alicia's and mine to her." Have you forgotten those words. Written in black ink, such neat flourishes. 'To love someone is to be also his enemy.' I strained to read the tiny handwriting that curled round the tissue page making it more difficult to understand. From this pen perhaps, with the feather half hidden in the Tunis vase, undesigned silver metal on your dressing table. I remember all your letters, Sylvia. I can visualize each page like a negative developing beyond mist in a solution that could drown...

"...in any case, writing you is not wasting time. It is a pleasure, the next best thing to talking to you, though the gap between the two is wide. There is no effective substitute for having you within talking distance. Talking of distance, talking or any other, the distance between us physically at least is reducing all the time. The time when we meet again is distinctly less distant than the time we said good byc. Will we feel awkward? Will you feel shy? In our last few minutes together...Or will the difficulties we imagine vanish? I think all it needs on my part is to see that slow, shy sweet smile of yours begin to dawn, and I'll know night has really ended. It is perhaps not good to write like this...I know it makes the distance hard to bear -- in your phrase, "it is inflicting." Also building up hopes exposes one to the danger of deep disappointment, but it is impossible not to look ahead in hope and anticipation..."

If we had not been standing on the veranda outside our rooms that same night, we might never have met. But, yet...I'm sure we would

have. More than circumstance. I remember how like a story she said the moon was, so glowing and round, the stars all listening and pointing toward us, and the mountains like now, papercut props leaning against the vague sky...Whom do you write to now with the strange and special

postage stamps?

"I think hope is quite valuable. It helps one to bear anything, the bad in the hope that things will improve, the good in the hope that it will but continue. Someone has even suggested that hoping for something is better than its realization or achievement," you wrote.

But always some reference to Alicia, to an artist I could only imagine from your descriptions. "Alicia was always a star, night or day. She glinted obsidian until dusk yawned in wake. Maybe that's why most people put out their shields and sought the shade in her presence. Though she was opalescent shimmer at night, still some could not stay and talk with her. Yet we talked." Always intertwined, memories of Alicia with your correspondence to me. So vague, like your travelogues, that I sometimes doubted your sincerity. But I answered you.

My letter -- "Perhaps so, but I think being with you is preferable than hoping to be with you. Even though together we may find difficulties. Sylvia, you are not too difficult, though you protest quite the opposite. I suppose I am at times too. Who is not, my lovely child?"

To think I still carry that picture in my wallet, as you carried hers.

"I just glanced at her photograph," you wrote. "...in my grey woolen sweater with the sun of her face and the wind in her hair." How long is your hair, Sylvia? You asked me the same question. "...would

you like some tortoise-shell combs?"

My photograph...One glance enough to make me want to give the time machine a sharp spin eliminating the next six weeks. "...your eyes of sparrow-grey, always on the verge of tears, speak in rhythm to the dancing of your black brows. A face like contorting clay whenever you become intensely sensitive. You are holding that pocketbook I sent you and pointing to 'The Ache of Marriage.' Denise Levertov. Page five. I know it by heart. I read it to you so many times.

It is leviathan and we in its belly looking for joy, some joy not to be known outside it..."

Sylvia, did you deceive me? Did we whorl inside the shell and lose truth together? I hear you writing again...

"Sometime, dear, give me details of your flight. What airline flight number and so on, the date and time of arrival, and Tomas and I will meet you on Sint Marten. There must be no inability to make contact this time or doubts in your mind about whether or not you are on a wild goose chase. There will be doubts, but let there at least not be doubts that I will be there and want to be. Neither let there be doubts that my feelings about you are genuine, and that I intend to be honest and sincere with you. I am too fond of you and respect you far too much for things to be any other way. And this despite the fact that I am wealthy -- which to you is synonymous with saying shallow, untrustworthy. I'm teasing you. I know you are not so naive as to believe that people behave in a way according to trade and that we are not capable of wide, individual variations..."

Sylvia, there is a certain innocence about you. I hope you never lose it. I don't mean the innocence of the world of a ten year old, rather a refusal that human nature is basically vile. Neither do I think you see all as good and shield your sight from the evil. Perhaps a type of idealistic realism -- if such a thing be possible. Then, why did you tell me that story first, Sylvia? I could bear the others, because there were so many involved, even I lost track of their individual peculiarities, and my sentience could fathom your men as being no more than cold christened figurines. They were Sylvia's playthings, and so I could laugh hearing you relate your episodes of play. But when you would tell me of her, and all the experiences you shared, even visiting the art institute to see Andrew Wyeth's exhibit, I would be secluded from you. Why could you never forget her? Even when you met me. Knowing each other all these years, Sylvia: did it mean nothing? I would have been your Alicia, if you had let me.

"I liked her when I first saw her," Sylvia told me. "But I wouldn't tell her that: I wouldn't tell anybody that. But maybe I liked her, because it was raining, and I had been especially alone for the last week, reading and writing at night in my garret flat, walking and job-hunting during the day. I wanted a friend, someone who seemed lonely too, probably. I was standing in the hall, right outside the director's door, but he was busy, so I tried not to look too conspicuous while I waited. Then she came by, and she peeked into his office just as I had done. But he was busy, so she also had to wait. I spoke first, as usual. Whenever I am lonely and I want to make a friend, I can." How true, Sylvia, because you spoke to me first that night too. You just looked at me and started a conversation, and I was amazed that I could stand there on the veranda dressed in my lounging pajamas and listen to such a strange and beautifully formed creature. We, who are not so flawless, always admire symmetry and unity welded. Art that is pleasing to the eye and mind. You wanted me as a friend then, didn't you? You were searching for someone to take her place, and yet only partially. You never completely yielded her memory. You persisted. Trying to capture the skeleton of another time, the ship of illusory past, the mirage of a gone ecstasy. Always Alicia, Alicia, Alicia, Alicia, I hear her name in the ebbing of the tide. In the breeze licking the net curtains, in the moonlight reflected on the wall. (Even now - am I writing this in the vain hope that you may someday read it?)

"It is only a matter of will. That is not conceit, is it? I asked her, 'Are you an artist?' What absurdity! Because she looked like she might be. I don't mean her clothes, because she was dressed quite conservatively. I mean, like most college girls, in a pleated skirt and green stockings that came up to her knees. But her eyes and her face were not those of a schoolgirl. Her eyes were deep, and if you imagine sight as possibly having fingers, she could reach out and hold you with those eyes, brown and sad."

Were you talking to me, Sylvia? "And sad. Yours are too, Sylvia, only grey. Eyes like clouds in a gloomy city sky. Sylvia, the clouds blow silent in the night. The house is asleep with its eyes open. My shadow paces across this bedroom wall. I hear the cat dreaming, waves pushing, sand writhing. Somehow the paper disappears beneath my pen. Sylvia, the clouds parade showing off...For you. Are you on the beach? Have you found a crippled dream? A twisted shell? Your footsteps spiral like folds of chif-

fon. Your eyes: grey and sad. Like clouds. So transparent, light, free. The wind's blown their insides away. Like clouds...I thought so eyen them...

"'Come away with me, Sabina, come to my Island. Come to my Island of red peppers sizzling over slow braseros, Moorish earthen jars catching the gold water, palm trees, wild cats fighting, at dawn a donkey sobbing, feet on coral reefs and sea-anemones, the body covered with long seaweeds...heavy nerveless hours in the violaceous shadows, ash-colored rocks and olive trees, lemon trees with lemons hung like lanterns at a garden party...""*

As though I took revenge on Alicia when I answered your beseeching letter. Do I dare persist...I want to make one meaningful pattern, to connect all the piecemeal reasons for my taking so much interest in...so much concern for Sylvia who lives with ghosts in a haunted castle she built according to a dream...to mold a solution...to be one's own architect...

So lifeless she is, was, will be. Sleeping next to me. Her ghost...my ghost...this room is really rather dreary. So small. I never noticed how small it was before. Like my room in the hospital, where I teach those children. I don't see why they aren't allowed to attend regular classes. It's just their reading scores, but I'm bringing them up higher than what they ever were. The compositions I read last year? Incredible. Not a single sentence. Fragments: But, they're coming along now. They really are quite creative. I'll have to see about getting them into a regular program. I am tired of words, pictures, sounds. As though I always need a vacation...blueprint of solace, peace...

"Her face was crinkled," Sylvia continued. "Frayed by time, like a child's toy left out in the rain too many times; and she was only nineteen. 'How old are you, Sylvia?' she asked me. Twenty-three. Are you surprised?"

Such a faraway look in your eyes, Sylvia. You never shared with me what you had with Alicia.

"'Yes, you seem older,' Alicia said."

And yet to me, Sylvia, you have always appeared to be a child.

"She had two pock marks on her right cheek. From a child's illness, chicken pox, common enough. Because of the rain, her face seemed translucent, lustrous."

Yours is too, Sylvia. Only no imperfections mar your flawless complexion, and I know all your beauty. Only a small brown freckle on

your left cheek. See, I am as aware of you as you were of Alicia. And now, a faint scratch on your neck. From my nail or hers or yours? But you are not a restless sleeper. I am. I often wake up in the middle of the night. It's the rushing of the ocean, the deadening lull of falling waters.

"Her voice was sincere, innocent. "I'm in the Studio Workshop," she

said. 'And you?' she asked me.

"I told her that I was in drama. I was tired of telling everybody that I was an aspiring photographer and having them look at me as though I were an undiscovered Kuleshov. 'I plan to teach,' I lied. 'Would you like to go for coffee after we both finish here?' As we were walking over to the River Room in the Union, Alicia told me how for one year she'd not been thinking of anything else but going there, to that renown Workshop. 'I think he'll be my adviser,' she said, waiting for me to add something. 'I don't know too much about this program though; it seems loosely organized.'

"I explained to her that I didn't know I was coming until about two weeks before then. I'm in the Workshop too, but I didn't want to say, back there. I didn't know if I liked you well enough to admit that. You're not offended by that, are you?""

Sylvia, you are so honest, aren't you?

"Let me tell you this story," you said. Why did you persist? I didn't want to hear about Alicia anymore. I wanted you to invite me in for coffee. For seven years that's all I have heard, until I can't bear to hear your lips mention her name one more time. Do you understand?

"Alicia had a southern accent, not affected, or too noticeable, just right. Nice. We took our cups of coffee to the table. 'Are you in oils or

mixed media?' I asked.

"' 'Well, I was accepted in sculpting, really; but I like to dabble." I told her it was the same for me, except I was not over-enthusiastic in the way I said it. Because of the rain."

The weather has a lot to do with Sylvia's moods. Especially if it's raining. That's when she chooses her friends. It was raining when she brought Tomas home for dinner shortly after I arrived a few weeks ago...

I had a good walk round the island. It was hot and dusty, and there is no variety to the scene. Row upon row of coconut trees with occasional glimpse of the ocean and reef through them. The people seemed very content. I saw no great signs of industry. Most were lying down or sitting in the shade and looked at me curiously, no doubt thinking about foolish Americans walking in the sun. I was joined for a time by a boy and a girl of about ten or twelve who were very friendly and curious. I saw a nun on a scooter pass in a great hurry. She seemed an incongruity. There was also a file of prisoners being marched by a

^{*}From HOUSE OF INCEST, a prose-poem by Anais Nin

policeman, presumably to work - something in the jungle. They did not look particularly depressed, and they waved me a bright good mor-

ning...

Tomas, who was with you at the airport. Tomas, who went with you to retrieve the mail. Tomas, a tall brown man with smiling eyes and crooked teeth; he put the mail in our box whenever the boat came. I would see him looking at the letters and then at the mailbox "Sylvia and Ruth Winters." Then he'd look back at the letters and see me peeking from behind the curtains; and he smiled, a wicked smile that reminded me of one of my students back in the hospital.

.

"I asked her to tell me about the things she liked and what she didn't like. And then, well...she looked like she wanted someone to talk to. I needed someone too."

You always need somebody, Sylvia. Why do you go on and on

about that girl? Always Alicia.

"'First of all, I'm Alicia Newman,' she said. In that breathy way of hers. I told her I was sorry I hadn't introduced myself, and that I was

Sylvia, just Sylvia, since I didn't like my last name."

But I love your last name. Didn't I have all my mail sent "care of Ruth Winters," and not what my own last name was? But you thought it was because I never had a sister. I had three sisters, Sylvia; I didn't need you as my sister. Will you change it on the mailbox now after...or will Tomas?

"She told me she was from Charleston. Looking out on the River, I wondered if we would get on together."

Did you wonder that about us while the moon was still bright and the mountains coiled around our inn like a long, black ridged snake?

"I had one truly good friend, only one really close girl friend, in my whole life, which of course wasn't too long at that time, although I felt it was somehow longer than actual years would have it."

I was jealous of Alicia. Sylvia was looking at the stars and the moun-

tains silhouetted against the dark and somber sky.

"That was Alicia, but she got married," she told me.

How my mind wanders like the pebbles on the bedspread. Distor-

ted shapes. And sand. Shadows in the design.

"Then it was as though her mind wandered and she forgot where she was, forgot that she was standing on the veranda outside our rooms, separated by a private hedge, talking to a stranger, a woman who, in fact, she had met only an hour ago.

But Sylvia has always been that way. So open, so honest, so

unassuming..."

Why did you continue on and on about Alicia? Couldn't you sense that she would always loom a vague threat in our relationship? Or was I just someone available, someone whom you chose, like Tomas, so that you could keep unthreading your memories of Alicia on the spool of time?

"Why did you do that, Alicia?" Sylvia continued. "We were so right for each other. I could talk with you. We liked to do the same things: walking over bridges, talking in cozy booths of Greek restaurants, stopping to feed the pigeons. I thought you would meet me in San Francisco, but instead, that postcard saying you were marrying some Jewish fellow in a few days. Why didn't you wait? If I could have seen you again, before the wedding, I would have changed your mind; I know I could have. You know it too. That's why you told me that you had moved, a new address, and not to bother trying to contact you. I loved you, Alicia. I never loved anybody until I met you."

Sylvia, why did you say that to me then? I was a stranger. I think I might have only wanted to be just a friend. But I could never forget your feelings towards Alicia then. I tried, but I could never match Alicia;

I could never dispel her shadow.

mind.

"Won't you come into my room and share some brandy with me?" I asked Sylvia then...

On a night as cool and enchanting as this one. I mean, now that we're together on our island (all three of us--like a three-head, three-heart monster) in the castle that Sylvia bought. And the only sounds I can hear...like time rustling through a coiled shell. Humans drowning...the caress of the waves...maybe the tide is guiding a sailboat back to a paradise where there aren't any Papeete old men to tag after beautiful black-haired, fair-skinned children. The sound of the sea splashing in a conch. Whorled memories. The moon is disappearing, and a mauve light slants the candle's shadow across the pages of my

Sylvia is a photographer for a travel magazine, or was. Until she sent for me. She confided in me that she always wanted to become an actress. I would be her make-up man and would design costumes to fit the roles: Desdemona, Emma, Milly Theale, Djuna. She interpreted them skilfully and emotively. The summer that we met, her assignment was to feature Colorado: "Crown Jewel of the Rockies" -- the title of her spread. She searched early in the mornings (after having breakfast with me) hiking way up into the mountains to capture what would make

"good fold-out page scenic cataracts or glistening mirror-like tarns." She showed me some of her pictures, at night, in front of the fireplace when outside the wind was blowing cold. Reality capable of exuding charming fiction, in those photographs, of Indian princesses perhaps swimming to their bathing lovers in the Devil's Punchbowl. Views of tabletop mountains and captions such as: "singing cascades dashing against chasm walls," or "cathedral-spires of spruce resting on an awakening lake in a Glacier Basin," and "gigantic pyramids of the Maroon Bells soaring to the tall blue skies."

"I explained that I merely sought a complete change of atmosphere, solace away from students and the classroom in the hospital. A teacher of the mentally handicapped away on a vacation, a chance to be secluded, to recuperate, perhaps time to regain communion with a lost friend, my self, my rationality. For I was beginning to feel there was nothing really wrong with my students, that in our own special ways we are all retarded in one form or another, mentally, emotionally, or physically. Sylvia had a way of capturing external reality. If only a photographer could take an inside picture. But how develop? (Yet you abandoned that when you sent for me. Taking pictures, I mean.) We were happy on this island. Even a few weeks is a long time. (I thought that you were beginning...and then you introduced me to Tomas, old smiling Papeete man with eyes that cast a spell over you, like a wizard. You started talking about Alicia again.)

"Sylvia always wanted to be a 360° prayer. She would have become the things she looked upon, like Keats' 'Negative Capability.' She wanted to be half of Yin and half of Yang. She was never satisfied, her life a continuous travel brochure, a series of highlights and spectacular sights. She wanted to be the extremes and the middle too. The places she told me about: castles in Mexico, tents on the Arabian deserts, guesthouses near the Wharf, garrets in Paris; all the things she had done: cruising through shadowy fjords, spelunking in caverns, climbing rugged Alpine peaks, swimming in island lagoons; and the men she had known: robust game-hunters, vicious politicians, austere bullfighters, venerable poets; but Sylvia had known nothing that would satisfy the hunger deep within her, 'a feeling that flowed through all the empty spaces in my body, when I had been with Alicia' that feeling she feared. But she knew, I'm sure she knew, but she kept hoping that...tomorrow, that hunger would disappear. 'There's a hunger inside me that's as rare as contentment,' she said in one letter. Always she ended our conversations with similar special postscript as though she were writing me verbal letters, struggling to sort out the jigsaw pieces of a truth puzzle, longing to be free to express her self in a way she knew was frowned upon

in normal society.

"'I shouldn't say this to you,' she told me once, 'but I was jealous of Alicia's husband. Why should he possess what was my only joy?' Sylvia, I would have done anything for you. I came as soon as I got your letter, didn't I? I was hoping that meant you finally realized that you needed me to take Alicia's place, really, completely. What does the world know, Sylvia?"

You were right. I didn't mind all those men. It was just Alicia, and your telling me all those memories. Then that Papeete native, Tomas, old enough to be your grandfather. I could understand that, but how compete with a memory? Or will Alicia never cease to exist for you?

"Tomas would come to dinner and ask Sylvia questions about Alicia, and he would cast a strange look at me. 'But you're not sisters? Then you must be related in another way, since the mailbox reads...' He was waiting for me to show some sign of discomfort, of jealousy. (Couldn't you see he was an incendiary? But you are so trusting.) He will not bother me anymore. He will not come with his sinister eyes and probing questions, to bring Alicia between us, like a ghost to haunt us even on our island. That man was like an albatross around my neck: while we washed our clothes in the stream in the morning; when we gathered coconuts from the leaning trees; as we sat on the rocks and baited the small fish for our supper; while we prepared our evening meal...Can't you see how he intruded on those pleasures which belonged to us alone? And all his questions to you regarding times with Alicia: 'And what books did Alicia like to read? Did you ever catch fish with Alicia? Would Alicia have enjoyed poi?" Even when we read books and exchanged poems in the still night...'in the still night'...never needing reasons...the slightest memory...you would snatch at the mist...illusory shadows...you would reach for the flesh of Alicia...Parts of her letters taped to your mirror...shreds of her soul tacked on the door, framed over your bed...'In the still night, in a cyclone of surf, I confessed I thought I might rise. Because I saw shadows with tin coffins searching for cockleshells. I knew which stars would be widowed, and I didn't want to witness any more shooting suicides. Pincers on the wings of a drowsy seraphim might have insured my ascent, had I attempted...but I stayed." " Sylvia, poltergeists live in this castle!

Soon old Tomas will come, as usual. But I will tell him that Sylvia had to return to New York for a special assignment. Or I will say that you are capturing snails. Perhaps I will admit that you left early, while it was still dark. Must I explain to myself...for my own understanding...

How long are your eyelashes! This curling instrument on the lace. A tube of lipstick. A compact. You told me about all the men in your life. But why did you tell me about Alicia? Alicia with the tangled

brown hair and breathy voice and disconnected thought. "Sylvia told me that she wrote a poem about her too; 'because Alicia was a poem,' she said." You never showed me the poem. You are a poem too.

"I have always felt in such perfect rhythm with Sylvia, but she has ever feared society's condemnation, the opinions of other people. She has such a difficult time facing the truth of her emotions. She wrote me of how lonely she was on this island: "...no phones to call you. I can only communicate with a letter and in my mind. I think of you often and all the fun we had in Chicago..." Sylvia visited me often in Chicago, between her assignments; and once she had to do a feature 'The Windy City in Winter,' so she stayed with me for three months. I have always spent my vacations with her: summers and a few weeks in spring and Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays; schoolteachers are fortunate in that respect. I don't think I'll go back to Room 131 this time though. The room is too small. And Michael's eyes; they are really malicious students."

I have learned much about you in these years. In these three weeks. I know that you would never have satisfied that hunger inside you. Not until Alicia was absolutely drowned, until your memory was completely...I could have taken Alicia's place, but you never let me, not really completely. How could anyone ever be closer than we were? Than we are right now? I can see you, Sylvia. You're still sleeping, like a child, so still. I have all your letters, and I have reread them all, more than once. I was thinking of you on my way here, holding the plane ticket bought with the money you sent me last Christmas...

You wrote me of the island and sent me a picture. Another travelogue. "Oranjestad, divided into the Upper and the Lower, is Statia's one town with a population of less than 30 who like to live within walking distance of each other. The Upper has stood since the 1700's and was so named because it was on the edge of a 220 foot cliff. Below on the long wide beach is the Lower which consists of huge stone warehouses, a pier, and a sea wall." Almost like a caption for the photograph. Sylvia, you beckoned me to a magic land.

I should burn these letters. I have carried them great distances. My mind is weary of so much sentiment.

"Dear Ruth, 'The hills step off into whiteness.

People or stars

Regard me sadly, I disappoint them.' "*

From "Sheep in Fog," a poem by Sylvia Plath

So much you travel! "I'll send you a gift with wings," you wrote. I knew it was the only way I would be able to ever join you. Where have you gone now? To find another shell? Sylvia, you are a petitgris snail. Even my students understand that a snail can never walk all the way out through the door of its house. Its body is attached to the inside of the shell.

"So many strange and faraway places. All postmarked to me. I opened each letter with a smile. The snow outside then was like the sand on the beach now. Wide-ribboned and undisturbed but not looking like this burnished dark gold, or one of your long chiffon scarves or nightgowns. It is partly black lava sand. And the wind! Perhaps that is what makes the chimes sound in the belltower on the cliff. Last night Sylvia talked in her sleep of bells and hands and Alicia. Is it Alicia's ghost? Or the phantasm of my Self in another time, when I was stronger or weaker, or perhaps merely younger. How wealthy Sylvia is ... and so I thought when I boarded the plane to Sint Marten. And yet she is never content. Because of this hunger inside her. 'This hunger inside me.' This hunger inside me, Sylvia. It's already spring in the city now, and I only left just a few weeks ago. I'm never going back to that school, to those children, to that cold. On this island it will soon be autumn. What a strange magic place..."

The clouds are low today. Outside, the sea is pounding on the sand. But Sylvia is at peace. We are both content now, at last. No more memories to haunt the mind. No more will she come between us. You told me that story so soon. But then you had to repeat it, over and over, always another face of Alicia. It has stayed with me all this time.

"I remember Sylvia's last letter, only three weeks ago; it cheered me. I hoped she had changed her mind, that now our friendship would be more than...perhaps she realized that this hunger was...how beautiful her letter: '...I never thought a month was a long period of time. But it is. A week is long. A day. An hour. A moment. I can't talk with anybody here. The men are quite handsome, yet they don't speak truthfully. Bland! They don't touch me. They come near me, but they never come close to me. They are so distant. I can't share poems with them or feelings. They don't understand my moods...'"

Were you thinking of her even then while you wrote to me? "Four-teen miles to the north of Statia, Esperanto rises as a single mountain peak wreathed in clouds. The cliff below curves in a vast arch, each end topping out to the sea and enclosing a beach so long that people at either end would look like midgets if you could see them at all. Only there

aren't any people... You must see me again."

But then you read me that poem. Why, Sylvia? In the presence of Tomas, after dinner. I had not been off the plane more than four hours. After I came so many miles to see you. After I decided not to ever leave you. It was a poem that I wished you had written for me.

"Sylvia's voice was breathy, like the sea in shells we used to find along the shore late at night when the moonlight played tag with the waves, rising and falling, over and under a shooting star. Last night, again, she read me the poem Alicia composed for her...in a voice eerie and transmundane...I thought I could hear Alicia..."

"She responded with her answering blood rhythms... like the sea. --Anais Nin

> I couldn't think the words to wrap the feeling that I had whorled inside me like a dream sleeping numb at night; in the wooden sea, a dryad swims,

all alone and cold. How tell opaque fear of too much liquid, sere, and drowning in a bell of wave? Let Djuna say.

Djuna was a pallid soul, like a mist she veiled conversation conveyed in concave other social shards. As though she were poriferous but could not pour the climate of their speech. She would smile and drift around the circle, rifting vision in a winding chain while the eyes of all Alicia's friends kept blindly staring her.

I am inchoate with only her, she thought.
Pale and demure,
flowing insecure,
I enfold you inside me
and half unhold me
within your own blood
in swollen virgin veins
that pain to throb
the flaming touch
of sense and sensitivity.

Are you twin to Himeros too?

Have you longed to stroke beyond the hair, the eyes, the lips,
the whatever's visible there,
to rasp bone imbedded deeper
than the brain, more abysmal
than eternal claim,
to hunger and this same overture:
I hear the confluence of our seas."*

Last night while the stars listened, and the waves lapped the sand, and the moon looked on, you read Alicia's poem again. The moon looked on, the only witness on that mysterious island...Last night while you read, while you slept, while you dreamed, I knew I would always be a stranger to you...

Where have you gone this time, Sylvia? With Tomas? With Alicia?

Perhaps you have gone...alone...

"The sun is waking now. Morning. Sylvia. Sylvia. Sylvia. I will not follow you this time. For I too must escape from this island. Although, I will always see you, Sylvia, sweet gentle Sylvia...running barefoot in the sand...Later, I will try to remember only those orange feather palms swaying on the purple mountains. I will not let myself hear the waves or the knell of your whispering words..."

"Let Djuna Say" by Rochelle Holt in To Make A Bear Dance (1970, Ragnarok Press)



REWALLPAPERING

By Arny Christine Straayer

Whenever I have an exceptionally pleasant and secure dream, it takes place in my grandma's house. Visiting her when I was a child was like being dressed for Easter. Unique regulations perturbed the body to a state of obedience. Grandma had an amazing push-button TV that we children were not allowed to touch. She had cherry trees not to be climbed, stone walls on which we couldn't walk, and a garden that she protected from our games. Her yard seemed so long then, that sneaking out back to the trash cans was considered running away. There was a slope in the front yard that we rolled down treacherously, only to be promptly scolded for flattening her grass. "Just look at you, Christy! My grass all over your pants. Go change into a pretty dress and we'll smell the flowers together."

In return for such upright behavior, Grandma's house offered heavy silverware, a secret bedroom where one wore a nightshirt, a porch swing and a basement crammed with old rocking chairs, wringer washing machines and canned goods. Grandma's delight was food. She demonstrated her love for us kids by baking our favorite pies at the appropriate times of the year: chocolate for Ralph at graduation, pumpkin for John at Thanksgiving, apple for Carol and cherry for me on our birthdays. I didn't know that I was making a lifelong commitment to cherry pie, but even today, she can entice me with it. Grandma considered a visit from us successful only if we ended the day with a sweet snack and arose the next dawn to a boundless breakfast of eggs, toast, meat, potatoes, fruit, cereal, ovaltine, juice and milk. This may seem a bit much for a kid, but it beat canned ravioli at home. And when my parents would come to drive me home, you better believe I would wave until Grandma was only a speck in the yard. I just hoped Grandma would invite me again, because rolling down her slope was about the most dangerous fun I ever had.

Grandma is the sort of person who requires five or six years to rewallpaper a room. In this way she's just like me. But it wasn't until I was nineteen years old that Grandma rewallpapered. Always before that, I thought we were different. No wonder, when she insisted that I eat unmelted butter, remember the depression everytime I ate candy, and wash my hands before cooking. I don't think Grandma always appreciated my right to individuality, or me, her right to nervous breakdowns.

I remember one time when my brothers and I were staying over-

night at Grandma's. After an evening of games, we started stripping off our clothes to camp in the living room. Now Grandma was pretty darn good at Chinese checkers but not so hot at giving advice.

"Christy," she said somewhat secretively in a pseudo-frail voice. "Come to the bathroom with Grandma." I followed respectfully, determined to make it short. "Now Christy, have you noticed that your breasts are budding?"

She had caught me off guard! How did she know? She'd hit me at my weakest point. Had I noticed? Had I noticed! I'd been noticing them thoroughly at least twenty times a day and more conscientiously at night. I was scared shitless that I was abnormal after all. Only the red part was swollen! That might be all right, but these extra bumps around the nipples, what about them? Anyway, I had noticed!

"Christy, you'll have to wear a shirt at all times now. You must never undress in front of the boys again."

"But Grandma, they're only my brothers."

"Christy, Christy, don't worry your grandma so." She seemed to think that the only reason I was ever bad was that I forgot she was my grandma.

"But I never wear a shirt in the summer."

"Promise me Christy. I'm afraid I'll have a nervous breakdown if I have to worry about it."

So I promised, which meant to her that I was over this stage at last. However, it galloped right on and Grandma continued doing everything she could to curb my tomboyish appetite for scraped knees and dungarees. Once, when I was a bit cranky from a speedy afternoon of baseball, she attempted an enema in her bathroom. "Naughtiness can arise from the bowel." A squirmy girl, a fat grandma, and soapy water however, can quickly ruin the sacredness one has endowed to a small bathroom with a clothes line! After that, Grandma and I had to find our common ground in sporadic activities like eating cherry pies, playing cards, and rewallpapering.

After years of consulting, Grandma insisted that the proper season and, in fact, day for this last project logically coincided with a visit from me. We worked all afternoon steaming and scraping the old wallpaper, me in jeans which for once were considered appropriate, and her in her usual apron. "Now Christy, I want you to peel it off layer by layer so I can see them all again. You know I've lived here forty-seven years. This room's been used for almost everything! Just think. Now we're making it a study again. But first I want to uncover the nursery paper. If we can, I'll show you where your mother drew her first valentine to me. On the wall!"

We labored with such fanaticism, that I soon sat on top a ladder dripping with sweat. I took a deep breath and held it a moment in the heat. Then courageously, "This heat is killing me! I'm taking off my

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Whenever I have an exceptionally pleasant and secure dream, it takes place in my grandma's house. Visiting her when I was a child was like being dressed for Easter. Unique regulations perturbed the body to a state of obedience. Grandma had an amazing push-button TV that we children were not allowed to touch. She had cherry trees not to be climbed, stone walls on which we couldn't walk, and a garden that she protected from our games. Her yard seemed so long then, that sneaking out back to the trash cans was considered running away. There was a slope in the front yard that we rolled down treacherously, only to be promptly scolded for flattening her grass. "Just look at you, Christy! My grass all over your pants. Go change into a pretty dress and we'll smell the flowers together."

In return for such upright behavior, Grandma's house offered heavy silverware, a secret bedroom where one wore a nightshirt, a porch swing, and a basement crammed with old rocking chairs, wringer washing machines and canned goods. Grandma's delight was food. She demonstrated her love for us kids by baking our favorite pies at the appropriate times of the year: chocolate for Ralph at graduation, pumpkin for John at Thanksgiving, apple for Carol and cherry for me on our birthdays. I didn't know that I was making a lifelong commitment to cherry pie, but even today, she can entice me with it. Grandma considered a visit from us successful only if we ended the day with a sweet snack and arose the next dawn to a boundless breakfast of eggs, toast, meat, potatoes, fruit, cereal, ovaltine, juice and milk. This may seem a bit much for a kid, but it beat canned ravioli at home. And when my parents would come to drive me home, you better believe I would wave until Grandma was only a speck in the yard. I just hoped Grandma would invite me again, because rolling down her slope was about the most dangerous fun I ever had.

Grandma is the sort of person who requires five or six years to rewallpaper a room. In this way she's just like me. But it wasn't until I was nineteen years old that Grandma rewallpapered. Always before that, I thought we were different. No wonder, when she insisted that I eat unmelted butter, remember the depression everytime I ate candy, and wash my hands before cooking. I don't think Grandma always appreciated my right to individuality, or me, her right to nervous breakdowns.

I remember one time when my brothers and I were staying over-

night at Grandma's. After an evening of games, we started stripping off our clothes to camp in the living room. Now Grandma was pretty darn good at Chinese checkers but not so hot at giving advice.

"Christy," she said somewhat secretively in a pseudo-frail voice. "Come to the bathroom with Grandma." I followed respectfully, determined to make it short. "Now Christy, have you noticed that your breasts are budding?"

She had caught me off guard! How did she know? She'd hit me at my weakest point. Had I noticed? Had I noticed! I'd been noticing them thoroughly at least twenty times a day and more conscientiously at night. I was scared shitless that I was abnormal after all. Only the red part was swollen! That might be all right, but these extra bumps around the nipples, what about them? Anyway, I had noticed!

"Christy, you'll have to wear a shirt at all times now. You must never undress in front of the boys again."

"But Grandma, they're only my brothers."

"Christy, Christy, don't worry your grandma so." She seemed to think that the only reason I was ever bad was that I forgot she was my grandma.

"But I never wear a shirt in the summer."

"Promise me Christy. I'm afraid I'll have a nervous breakdown if I have to worry about it."

So I promised, which meant to her that I was over this stage at last. However, it galloped right on and Grandma continued doing everything she could to curb my tomboyish appetite for scraped knees and dungarees. Once, when I was a bit cranky from a speedy afternoon of baseball, she attempted an enema in her bathroom. "Naughtiness can arise from the bowel." A squirmy girl, a fat grandma, and soapy water however, can quickly ruin the sacredness one has endowed to a small bathroom with a clothes line! After that, Grandma and I had to find our common ground in sporadic activities like eating cherry pies, playing cards, and rewallpapering.

After years of consulting, Grandma insisted that the proper season and, in fact, day for this last project logically coincided with a visit from me. We worked all afternoon steaming and scraping the old wallpaper, me in jeans which for once were considered appropriate, and her in her usual apron. "Now Christy, I want you to peel it off layer by layer so I can see them all again. You know I've lived here forty-seven years. This room's been used for almost everything! Just think. Now we're making it a study again. But first I want to uncover the nursery paper. If we can, I'll show you where your mother drew her first valentine to me. On the wall!"

We labored with such fanaticism, that I soon sat on top a ladder dripping with sweat. I took a deep breath and held it a moment in the heat. Then courageously, "This heat is killing me! I'm taking off my shirt."

"Well why not? I'm only your grandma."

At that, we seemed to relax, slow our pace, and actually enjoy the work as we slipped back into our quiet selves. Sometimes I'm like that, very quiet, especially when someone who generally doesn't understand me seems to be accepting me. I usually feared that conversation with Grandma would demand our differences. I've often wondered during times like these, what she would say if she knew that I am a lesbian. Probably deny it. Maybe take me into the bathroom. But she'd never ask for more details. How do you explain to a grandma that lesbianism is not a sexual sickness? That it is a way of life that I choose, a feminist principle, an appreciation of myself. That it's not because I was a tomboy and she shouldn't, "Oh dear," have been stricter with me.

I was reflecting on my bared chest muscles when I realized that I was uncovering a face. Very carefully, I picked away the stiff layers of paper until I had exposed the picture of a beautiful young woman with gay seductive eyes, plump round cheeks, and a mass of dark curls.

"Rosa!" Grandma whispered behind me. "You found Rosa!"

I turned to find her face full of pleasure and tender distance, caught

in the memory of a past love.

"Oh Christy! Isn't she beautiful? If only you had known her." Her humped shoulders seemed a bit lighter than usual, and her tight mouth relaxed as she explained that "Rosa wallpaper" had been a very exclusive thing before the days when wallpaper was printed for cheaper prices. Rosa had been very popular. Schools were established to teach young artists specifically to draw her face so that, wherever one went across the country, Rosa would look the same.

Had my grandma drawn this face, back in the days when repetition and order were perfection, when life probably made more sense to her? My mind raced backwards in her years and imagined her long dark skirt climbing up stairs to some old office. At the collar of her pintucked blouse was a cameo broach, fastened seven or eight times that morning to insure its absolute alignment. "Above all, an artist understands symmetry." Her bushy red hair (they say it was exactly the same color as mine) was pressed flat by a rather large and severe hat that remained horizontal as she walked, until an upward tilt of her chin needed emphasis. Occasionally she concocted a subtle arch of the shoulder to accent the notebook held at her side.

"Here it is Christy." She'd been squeezing through a filthy trunk and now presented a stack of yellowed papers. "Here's a picture of me then. That's my spaniel. Here's my teaching certificate. Worth nothing now. My notes. Very spruce?"

"Very spruce. I didn't..."

"Here it is." Rosa's face was full of lines and arrows, circles with curves extending, measurements and notations.

"Could you do it again?"

"Of course. Even half blind as I am now."

"They're exactly alike."

"Back in those days we were taught to be precise."

"I'm proud of this, Grandma. I mean I'm really impressed. I didn't know..."

"Put your shirt on. Quick! I hear someone coming."

Grandma had attended school and worked regular hours when it was more customary for a young woman to be home baking bread. Later, she must have carried her business nature into her kitchen, for I've always known her to be most particular about numbers per stack of china and placement of dish towels. In fact, her whole house is like a file box. "Pencil? Third drawer on the left in the dining room buffet. In the cigar box. Please be sure to put it back."

It's not that Grandma is against change or doesn't value variety and creativity. Indeed, she's like a tulip in an oriental vase to me. For though her piano was always out of tune, she could accompany any sweet child's verse by ear. At eighty she's learning French. "And German, by the time I'm a hundred!" Grandma is certainly not dull. It's just that she can't understand why people don't respect propriety anymore. "Oh dear. Now I have to find something suitable for these walls. Paper these days is just junk!"

In an afternoon, I saw my grandma love a world of her own, unknown to me, separate. I acknowledge that she treasures moments and insists on morals that I don't even know exist. I can't say that we understand each other. But Rosa seems pleasant to us both, and Grandma longs to share her hidden life, to be appreciated. In this way, she's just like me.

"All of my life has been spent in work. Very hard work. I know I have missed many things but I did not waste time with distractions. If you want to make a great career you must be sincere and deprive yourself of many things. But I made that decision at the beginning of my first night and I have maintained it. I want to be near perfection--and nothing in life is perfect--so I have been very serious and disciplined. You need experience to be an artist--and that doesn't come in a few months or a few years. So many singers have come forward with beautiful voices for two or three years, then they disappear and nobody hears about them. They have not taken their life or their career seriously..."

--Lily Pons, quoted in Columbia's commemorative album "Coloratura Assoluta" released following her death on February 13, 1976.

Book Reviews



Lesbian Crossroads: Personal Stories of Lesbian Struggles & Triumphs by Ruth Baetz William Morrow & Co., New York, 1980 Hardbound, 273 pp., \$10.95

Upon the ending of her five-year "marriage" (first lesbian relationship) with Maria, Ruth Baetz found life to be "excruciatingly painful and confusing." Searching for her own identity, needing emotional support "from women" and trying to find out what it meant to be a lesbian in this society led her to write this book.

According to Baetz, "The women [in this book] are not representative of all lesbians...These women are survivors. They have not been physically coerced, or psychologically or religiously guilt-tripped out of their sexual preference. They have not been permanently institutionalized or killed. Nor have they committed suicide in despair. They have been strong...willing to take the label of lesbian."

In the 1st chapter you will meet 15 lesbians--talking about their own realization of being a lesbian. The 2nd chapter tells how these lesbians deal with their parents and siblings, and you will meet some of their mothers. The 3rd chapter deals with children, the children of lesbian mothers.

The 4th chapter looks into two of our more important institutionswork and school. And in the 5th chapter, you will take a look at religion and hear stories some of the lesbians have to tell about it.

The 6th chapter is on therapy, 7th on discrimination, 8th on politics and the law, and the 9th on culture.

The 10th chapter is on the Lesbian Community and is followed by a resource list to help you find your community wherever you are.

Reading this book is almost like meeting a lot of new friends, and this is what I hope it will do for lesbians everywhere -- especially those who are "alone" in Nowheresville, U.S.A., each thinking she is the only one in the whole wide world -- and those whom society has pressured into unhappy/unfulfilling heterosexual relationships. I hope every bookstore and every library will be "nagged" into carrying this book.

I want to close this review by quoting the Preface from the book, for I think it says more - has more consciousness-raising power than any short statement I have ever read:

"Imagine that you sister's friend is writing a book about heterosexuals and you have agreed to be interviewed. She is very serious in asking you these questions and needs well-thought-out answers.

"There are only three major questions: "1. What is your definition of a heterosexual? (Is it a political stand? A lifestyle? Sexual attraction whether acted upon or not?)

"2. How did you come to realize you are a heterosexual?

"3. What did you have to deal with after you realized it?

"Some things to consider in answering these questions might be: What had you heard about heterosexuals before you realized you were one? Had you ever met one?

"How long did it take for you to accept that label? How long did you try to be homosexual, bisexual, celibate?

"Have you told your parents you are heterosexual? If not, how do you keep it from them? If so, how did you do it? How has telling or not telling affected your relationship with them?

"Have you told your sisters and brothers? Other relatives?

"How have you dealt with telling or not telling your children?

"Did you have any religious conflicts when you realized you were a heterosexual? If so, how have you resolved them?

"How have therapists reacted to your heterosexuality? Have they tried to cure you? Have they taken you seriously?

"Did you let your schoolmates or teachers know you were heterosexual? How did they react?

"Do your co-workers know? If so, how have they reacted? If not, how do

you keep it from them? Have you told your boss?

"Have you experienced discrimination or harassment for being heterosexual, and if so, how have you handled it?

"Has realizing you're heterosexual changed your political views?

"Did you have any cultural conflicts when you realized you were a heterosexual? Are people of your culture supportive of heterosexuality? Have you felt torn between working for the rights of your ethnic group and working for heterosexual rights?

"How did you find other heterosexuals to relate to?

"Would you ever have 'come out' as a heterosexual if you had known you would have to deal with all these issues, make all these decisions, and take all these risks? Would you still be trying to be someone you're not in order to avoid this pain?"

-- Reviewed by Johnie Staggs

So Long As There Are Women by Elula Perrin William Morrow and Co., New York

A Parisian nightclub owner has set down vignettes from the lives of seven lesbian contemporaries in this 1978 collection. Translated from the French in 1980, it is easily accessible from the New Book Section of the San Jose Public Library.

The introduction, "You Dirty Dyke," is a brief capsule of the author's political views: an odd combination of radical feminism, traditional role orientation, and a tolerating 'live and let live' philosophy. Although Ms. Perrin's views are interesting in their novelty, the life stories are much more powerful in their raw authenticity.

The experiences presented cover a wide spectrum, from the stunted desires of elderly "Madeleine" to the free-spirited sexuality of "Dany." Young "Beija Flor's" strict separatist stand is juxtaposed with the conservative politics of "Elodie," who even goes so far as to disapprove of transsexuals!

Any lesbian who has ever felt alone, lonely, and undesirable will find herself in "Anne-Marie." But someone in love will appreciate the erotic reminiscences of "Judith" and "Sylvia."

Ms. Perrin's friends are both real and believable. They cross age, race and class lines. Critics may argue that, for a book about lesbians, straight men are mentioned too often. It must be remembered, however, that a large portion of many lesbians' lives are spent dealing with these men.

So Long As There Are Women offers the American lesbian an opportunity to look at the complex culture of France, how it treats our French sisters, and the variety of ways they respond. One finds that, despite the differences, the stories are fundamentally universal.

Due to either the translation or subject matter, not all the stories are

spell-binding. If nothing else, however, this book includes a valuable contribution to the growing collection of lesbian erotica. For that alone, it is to be enjoyed.

--Reviewed by Sharon T.

The Mendola Report: A New Look at Gay Couples by Mary Mendola Crown Publishers Hardbound, 269 pp., \$12.95

"Gay couples living together are very similar in almost every respect to heterosexual couples...there are no significant differences..." These are the findings of the **Mendola Report**, based on a nationwide study/numerous personal interviews conducted by the author.

The response to the original questionnaire was high, 27%. The respondents are male and female, from their teens to their late 60's, they are all very human human beings, trying to be happy in the world today.

Within these 269 pages the couples interviewed share their experiences in all facets of living from "Where Do Gay Couples Meet" to "Gay Widowhood" -- and each and every thing that could possibly happen in between. There are statistics, but unlike other books written on "Gays" (based on a questionnaire) the statistics are incidental, the book is real/alive and human.

This book should be called an encyclopedia, for its information is so vast. In the first chapter, you will meet 13 gay couples and "hear" them discuss their lives. You will follow them throughout the book as well as meeting others who discuss their personal experiences regarding defining their relationships, sex and commitment, sources of conflict in a relationship, alcoholism, raising children, living in a "mixed" world, planning for old age, financial partnerships, divorce and death.

Meet Beverly and Debra -- over 22 years ago in 1957, they met while college students. After 15 years, Debra had an affair with another woman. Both of them see their relationship as the basis of their lives. They are very serious about the future.

And then meet Em and Louise. Em said, "You see, I was in a lonely situation before I met Louise. I needed someone I could love and someone who'd love me...I prayed about it...I know this sounds crazy, but I laid out specific instructions [for God]. I prayed to God to send me a good Swedish woman; I'm Swedish, you know...I wanted her to be a dark-haired Swede, not bigger than 5'-3" because I'm a big woman (she blushes) and I didn't want a woman who was going to be bigger than me...He sent me Louise."

Next we meet Lisa and Marje. Lisa explains what she sees as the difference between living together and being committed, "If you are committed, you feel more responsible in terms of the other person..."

"A commitment," adds Marie, "is common sharing...it's emotional, physical and spiritual bonds...sex is over-emphasized...the important things in a relationship are the sharing and the understanding..."

Charlotte and Nancy, who are in their forties, have been together for 13 years. "The women's liberation movement," Charlotte explains, "had a tremendous impact upon me. When you're ill, disabled, not working and not earning any money, it's pretty difficult to go to your partner and say, Hey you, husband, whoever you think you are. I want to liberate our relationship."

And many, many others, with oh so many different stories.

Read, enjoy, cry, laugh and find parts of yourself. Give it as a gift, the very best kind--a look at being gay. -- Reviewed by Johnie Staggs

Libby by Milt Machlin Tower Publications, Inc. Paperback, 379 pp., \$2.75

The biography of Libby Holman, the torch singer accused of murdering her millionaire husband, the most sensational case of the 1930s.

Her marriage to millionaire playboy Smith Reynolds (Reynolds Tobacco) was the news of the time. Just a few months later, Reynolds was shot on his estate in North Carolina. Though Libby was accused of the murder, no conclusion was ever reached. Everyone, even those closest to her were equally divided on the question of her innocence or guilt. That question was a shadow over her tragically haunted life, as violent death claimed many of those closest to her, including her only child.

The theme of the book is did she or didn't she do it -- with new evidence dug out by the author. The real meat of the book is Libby's life and loves -- beginning in 1929 when she met and fell in love with Jeanne Eagles, and ending just five years after the death of her last great love. Montgomery Clift.

Throughout the entire 379 pages, one gets a glimpse of "real" lives of many of the great stars of the time, visits Harlem, the salons, and Broadway with Libby and her friends and lovers.

To sum up the good and bad of it: On the negative side, Libby was a heavy drinker, a pathological user of drugs, a person of bizarre sexual appetites, a woman seldom capable of constancy in love, a person capable of maliciously using a sarcastic and pungent wit. On the positive side, she was brilliant, intellectual, generous, funny, kind to her friends, and enormously talented...," said the author, Milt Machlin. And I must agree with him after reading his moving account of Libby Holman.

-- Reviewed by Johnie Staggs

Ruth Turk has contributed an annoying addition to the growing collection of misguided novels concerning homosexual "love." Fortunately for her, it is probably destined to become a best-seller solely because it combines the right assortment of popular attitudes with a compellingly readable writing style. Unfortunately for the gay movement, straight readers will find plenty of reinforcement for their superficially right-on answers to gut-level questions which they would prefer not to face.

The plot revolves around two main characters, Philip and Adam. Philip has fathered two daughters in a marriage which has apparently been consummated only twice. We are expected to believe that neither he nor his wife has ever questioned his lack of sexual drive. Adam is presented as the bastard son of an ex-stewardess, living with her and a tyrannical stepfather, but always dreaming of the father he never knew. Philip and Adam are thrown together enough times to cause the reader some impatience before their mutual infatuation is acknowledged.

A trite chain of events takes place which will not be covered here, for the benefit of those who are bent on reading the book themselves. What will be pointed out, however, are the methods Ms. Turk employs

to promote prevailing stereotypes about gays.

Physical attributes replace full character development for this author's purposes. On page 3, we learn that at the age of twelve. Adam looks more like a girl than a boy. In case one might be tempted to write that off as typical childhood androgyny, we are reminded on page 23 that his body is physically shaped like a female, with "sloping shoulders and a small waist." Readers who are familiar with the work of psychologist Havelock Ellis will recognize the reference to 'inversion,' a pre-Freudian theory which explains homosexuality as a congenital disease. 'Inverts' were believed to be a third, neutral sex, born with the genitals of one sex, but having the outward appearance and behavior of the opposite sex. Numerous examples of body/sex role confusion throughout this novel show us that, unhappily, this century-old theory is still popular.

Freud's theories on homosexuality have pervaded our society so deeply that it is almost impossible to separate and study them individually. Ms. Turk offers a sprinkling of many, and readers are free to choose whichever explanation makes the most sense to them.

For example, Philip grew up with an absentee father, ruled by a domineering mother and sister. This is perhaps the most popular of Freud's theories explaining male homosexuality. The desire for incest (regarded as a form of retarded development by many Freudian psychologists) takes this situation one step further. Adam finds in Philip a strong resemblance to the father he never knew, as seen in a snapshot Adam cherishes. For his part, Philip continually confuses his feelings for Adam with those one would feel for a son. The father/son incest theme is repeated sufficiently throughout the novel to be sure the reader gets the point.

Narcissism is another popular theory "explaining" homosexuality. Adam and Philip's close physical resemblance is remarked upon often

in the novel.

Ms. Turk then covers all of these familiar theories over with all of the right words taken from gay political literature. However, she gives us no reason to believe them. We find Philip denying that he finds Adam the answer to his wish for a son. Instead, Philip proclaims that he "loves" Adam. Yet what does this love truly consist of? Meaningful looks and furtive sex are all that their relationship comprises. They almost never communicate throughout the novel. Sex solves everything. With it, all

fears and doubts are magically washed away.

Coming out is set up to be another magic wand, with no political theory to back it up. Adam continually demands that Philip "come out." And Philip does so, many times. On page 204, we find Philip proclaiming his homosexuality to a rap group of gay men. At this point, the words supposedly make him free. Later on, however, coming out is defined as leaving a psychologically damaging gay relationship for a healthier one. After relating his sorrows over Adam to a friend, the friend tells Philip, "You know what you have to do." Philip responds with, "You mean I have to come out of the closet?" At which point, Philip moves in with someone else, and we are left with the assumption that this action is what coming out truly means.

The misconceptions abound plentifully from start to finish. Whether inversion, narcissism, or an incest wish are reasonable theories

explaining homosexuality is not in question here.

What is objectionable to this reviewer is the basic assumption that homosexuality must always be explained, especially when it is explained in terms of derogatory psychological theories. Ms. Turk's usage of contemporary buzzwords partially glosses over these convenient historical stereotypes. The fundamental grounds for prejudice remain intact.

When homosexuals are no longer presented as animals controlled by lust or psychological diseases, then the gay movement will know it has made some real progress in raising society's consciousness. The confusing messages conveyed by this author tell us that we still have a long way to go. Freud's theories explaining male homosexuality. The desire for incest (regarded as a form of retarded 'development by many Freudian psychologists) takes this situation one step further. Adam finds in Philip a strong resemblance to the father he never knew, as seen in a snapshot Adam cherishes. For his part, Philip continually confuses his feelings for Adam with those one would feel for a son. The father/son incest theme is repeated sufficiently throughout the novel to be sure the reader gets the point.

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