

## Disrespected Woman

During the 1970's many men who demonstrated against the war in Vietnam claimed once the war was over nothing of any value happened. And many women disagreed...the women's movement happened. Women were leaving men and boyfriends and fathers and heading into the unknown light to create their own gods and philosophies and wisdom where they spun their own stories - scratching beneath the wounded surface of our being.

1. The sun is shining through a tear in the curtain. I've thrown nearly everything out or giving it away, so I have only a few boxes of things left. I have to beg him to keep it in storage for me. He is buying a house and taking our children with him as well have all of his own things... Okay, okay, so he has convinced me that I am not a good mother. After all, I have no skills with which to support the children. If.

My 11-year-old son, peaks in the door. My body created him, held him, and I love him before I ever knew who he was.

"Mommy, if I bring you some coffee, will you wake up?" He asked me in his high voice. He's up before everyone else and feels lonely, so he brings coffee, and sits on my bed. The top. I tell him I want to know everywhere, he will be today- in case Fonzie comes to visit. I just want to know where to find him. I don't care what he does as long as I don't hear about it from some adult later on.

I tried to use the bathroom, but my daughters using it. "Don't get blood all over," I tell her. I know she's on her period And loves to play with her new blood. She wants to know if she and I will be going anywhere today. She's into hanging out with me and my friends since she got this new body of hers- before that, she was content with girls her own age. I tell her yes, yes. And that I will be leaving tonight.

I go downstairs to the kitchen. The cousin of believing this, and who came to take me to Louisiana with her, is sitting with her lover and my friends, sipping coffee and chatting. The goldfish is almost dead. So I have transferred it from the silver salad bowl to the fish bowl. It is in the middle of the table and everyone is watching it intensely. I changed the water again, and the fish perks up- a few hours from now. It will act as though it's dying again. This changing bowls has been going on for days.

I spent three nights on the bus to Louisiana, and it will take for ever for the memory of my children to fade. I'm afraid to be on my own, and I wonder what will kill me first, hunger or loneliness. I can still feel my children's bodies pressed against mine. I still hear myself whispering to them when I leave, I love you, goodbye, be good.

Cousin is sitting in the back of bus with lover. We are riding along a dark endless highway. I am sitting in front, because I like to feel like I'm driving. My legs are swollen, and I am sitting next to a very large woman, who has a case of diarrhea of the mouth. Not only does she talk nonstop, for when I began to does she hits me in the roots with her elbow and says— now ain't that sompton and so-and-so—

While we are riding through the desert the bus began to act up. The air conditioning breaks, and the many babies and small children on the bus are sick and puking everywhere. One woman holds two babies on her lap for three nights. The bus driver sees" That she only paid for one seat and says, "Stack 'em up lady. Someone wants to sit there!" There are never any empty seats for her children.

Cousin, lover, and I rent a dressing room for \$.25 an hour in the Houston bus terminal. We stretch out on the floor and groan until we are told the hour is up. Then back on the bus with the rest of the meserable population.

Finally, we are in cousin's trailer in Louisiana. I am at one end and cousin and lover are quarreling at the other end. Then they are making love, causing the trailer to tremble sway.

We leave the next morning to pick up cousin's little daughter from deep, deep down in the woods relatives house. The house is a shack that sits on cement blocks and leans to one side as though it were trying to get under a tree and away from the hot summer sun. Chickens are being chased by a boy through the shack's curtained front door out through the swinging door in back. They are being chased by a small boy with his arm in a cast. A small girl removes her teeth for me— to show me she already has faults ones like her grandmother. She is 10 years old, and her dress hangs oldly on her.

Woods relative is very loud—SHE HAS NEVER HAD TO LOWER HER VOICE. If we were sitting under a tree in a city, instead of here in the country, her voice would echo from block to block. "... So anyway," she is telling us, "I was down thar diggin' this har ditch with two other guys an the boss calls me

outta the ditch and tells me I'm fired! No reason. So he done tol the union I was leaning on my shovel chawin' the fat with the boys—plus know what else he said? That I wasn't able to do hard labor—like 7 kids ain't hard labor! Well, I knew I had it licked—the dude that was arbitratin' was black an if he don know what DIScrimination is no one does. Look here what he wrote: 'the boss is obviously anti-woman and that is why this woman was fired.' LORD! I'm gettin' 12 months in back wages!"

We all congratulate her. Her husband is undressing me with his eyes and batting flies from his sweaty shoulders. The relative's brother arrives in a rickety truck and announces his preacher wants to meet us. Everyone laughs. The brother drawls real slow, like he's chewing, drinking, and smoking pot. Relative says, "If ya'll scard he goina beat ya over da head with his bible then ya'll better git outta here!" We watch preacher man walking through a field with a big black book in his hands and dust following every step. We quickly leave for cousin's place.

So cousin, lover, daughter and me are back in the trailer. This time, the three of them are quarreling. The clock on the wall rings after an hour, and the daughter sleeps while the lover goes out and gets plastered, leaving cousin and me alone. It is pleasant, I wish we could be together— just her and I for a while. We color in her daughters book and talk about everything we remember ever doing together. And we laugh and feel sad sometimes too. I suddenly wish woods relative was here. And cousin, and Woods relative and me would all go to the banks of the Mississippi and out of the place of our grandmother— who gave birth to so many— who also gave birth to many who are to this day creating more lives. Lover returns and passes out on the bed.

Just as I fall asleep two Cajuns pound at the door. Lover groans and lets the women in. They are shouting in French and English. Even at that I find their speech enchanting. Cousin pulls herself together flipping lights on and offering to serve coffee. The clock over the sink stopped at midnight so all that is known is that it is very dark and otherwise quiet out.

"We don'a raise er kidz like dis!" It seems cousin's little girl pulled another girls pants down and the women who share parenting for the other little girl are upset. Later, sometime before dawn, cousin says, "I don't know what the holy hell they're upset about - both of em in and out of prison for armed robbery, prostitution and god knows what all."

The next day we joined the women for a Cajun out door feast of crawfish at their

housing project. Neighbors joined in with fiddles and Cajun music. The little girls played and sang and all was forgiven around the pulled down unders affair.

I left - just moved on. Got on another long trip bus with over flowing tolites and stops at greecy food joints and ended up in the Florida Keys. The bus the land everywhere children and outside and deep inside me. They are all over me - I can hear them in the slience. They are laughing - crying *Mommy mommy mommy*.

Two big sisters take me in and realize I am having some sort of breakdown. They are kind and patient and resumbe long legged cranes that feed on small life forms in the salty sea that waves at their door. I am irratic - terriorist like - squat and aboriginal and they are kind - so very kind. I repay them by leaving.

I go back to the city where my children are. I'm on a boss going through town - I can't stay -not ready by hold my head down and cover my eyes as the bus passes through town. I was afraid I would see my daughter window shopping. For my son writing his skateboard. I might not be able to control the urge to jump down from the Bus and grab them up in my arms. Where would we go? How would we live? I fill sick like when I had a miscarriage. I was going to stay but I can't. I can't pretend I don't mind that my children are not going to live with me. I'm homeless. I have to leave and I don't really know where to go. I end up in Seattle. Then I am far away from friends loved ones but the pain follows me.

I don't know if the goldfish died because I have not been in touch with anyone for many weeks now. I am living in a basement and can stay for 20 days until I get paid. I work for some dreadful disease getting \$3.00 An hour. I'm down to my last dollar until I get paid. I'm staying at a charity house in Seattle and the people are tired of being nice to people in trouble. I have promised to slip quietly to and from the basement and no one for anything. I have looked before housing but either I am suspicious to others are they are to me.

I want my daughter to run and get a paper so we can meet our horoscopes. I worry about her and her brother crossing the street to go to school. But then, there are so many things to worry about - will they grow up - will they achieved what they want- will someone hurt them? I'm afraid I will never have a kitchen where my friends can sit and have a coffee - I will never have a place to live- I'll always be destitute - will the children survive eating junk food and watching Too much TV? Will I ever be able to outgrow the dependency of the teen years of knowing where everything in the kitchen is? But if I stayed, the fish would still have died.

I feel that even though my children are not with me, no matter what happens they

will have the silent memory in them that they began their lives inside of me and they were nursed that my breast until they were year old. I gave that to them, and I can not be richer to them than that. What I haven't given is more than all the men in the world with all the power and money can give. This is what I guerrillas left with.

It is not depressing because I'm going to become like a cockroach. They were everywhere - every kitchen is theirs... They're anarchist and look queer and have a foul smelling breath to ward off enemies, a has what ever size wings she wants. She immediately cleans herself after man has touched her because she finds his touch so offensive. She lays her eggs in a magical shell and hides them. That is all she does for her young. We have out lived other prehistoric creatures. We own the night. We do not travel in army's like ants, who are predictable, but scatter like guerrillas. Then has tried many methods of destroying us... From stepping on us to using chemicals that destroy everything. I will not die or go away or forget. I am becoming a cockroach.