

I MUST NOT ROCK



by

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Introduction

One day before my mother died she asked me to visit. After years of therapy and confusion in hating and loving her, I'd come to terms with and accepted the past. I didn't know if it was possible to be with my mother without blending the past with the present.

The old house she had lived in for over 40 years was showing wear and tear. Wildflowers filled the cracks in the cement steps left by earthquakes. They were bright yellow and died each year to be born again in spring. Mother paid a gardener who barely touched anything. He offered to remove cardboard boxes and rotting pieces of wood that were propped against the house but she didn't allow it because she felt she may have needed them someday.

On this particular evening she was sitting at the dining room table shredding papers. She was at one time an excellent artist. Some of her paintings were propped up in corners while others hung askew on the walls.

Each room of this rather large home was filled with cardboard boxes of papers, of clothes, of gadgets and whatnots—many were purchased from TV. Nothing seemed to be orderly or follow a pattern. It was like so many pieces of so many jigsaw puzzles scattered around the rooms.

There was a room just off the dining room where she kept her cat so he wouldn't get away. I remember the cat was desperate to get out while I was there. The stench from the room was overwhelming there were piles of kitty litter inches thick. This was the same room I once had as a child. I am no longer affected by the drama of the past I did however feel sad for the cat.

Mother was a small woman who was a collage of European and Native American. Her face was clear in comely. Her once dark here turned white her eyes were a bright green. She didn't look at me when she spoke.

"I want you to decide what happens to me if I get sick," she said. "look over there on the buffet. There's a big yellow envelope- I got a lawyer to make it all up for me."

The buffet was stacked with everything. I saw a number of Manila envelopes. I also came across a note book that was filled with Biblical concordances: in row after row of shaky handwriting, *John: 4, 7, Mark:11,25* and so on for pages and pages. I didn't know what these scriptures said, only that mother had written them down as the preacher shouted from the bible at church.

I sigh. "Does the envelope have some writing on the outside? What's the lawyer's name?"

She was shredding junk mail. The shredder was a new toy. "I don't know what his name is," she answered me in her three year old voice. I wanted to shake her and scream –

Look if you want me to help you do something then you'll need to help me. And don't give me that shit about Jesus will take care.

But, I would never ever have talked to my mother like that still there was a limit to my patients. We were locked into the same story and could not leave until the end.

I finally find the envelope. Inside is a durable power of attorney form. It gives me the right to look after my mother's affairs when she was too unable to do it for herself.---*how sick do you have to be before you let someone cleaned out this firetrap? Don't you know how I freaked out every time I heard news about a house burning to the ground killing everyone?*

"What will you do if the house catches fire?" I asked carefully so as not to offend. She then reminded me that when the Oakland fire storm destroyed thousands of houses and many acres of land, her house was not affected. She

was convinced it was because her sisters prayed for her. I hope there is a heaven and she is now there with her brother and sisters.

I remember finding a picture of me the on the floor that had fallen out of a photo album that was stacked in a corner. In the picture, I was 11 years old and staying in the cat's room. The cat was not there at the time. However there was a terrible stench from the body cast that was used to keep my broken hip in place. Strangely enough, the photo didn't affect me. It was from some other planet or some other girl or a story from a nineteenth century novel.

I showed Mother the picture and asked her what album it belonged in. "Oh, just set it on the table. Umm, I remember this," she said, looking closely at the photo as she turned it over in her hands. "Joe gave me the film. That's when all the flowers were blooming in the yard and we ate watermelon."

Her memory was so different from mine. It confirmed that this was our story – not just mine.

In 1977 a book I wrote years before about my life had been published. It was a thinly disguised novel. It was published by Daughter, Inc. a New York publisher. I was filled with an unbridled rage. The women I knew were just beginning to create a language that defined our lives separate from men's. I rarely heard stories of the child abuse many women must have experienced. Our souls were wounded in a way that somehow could not be expressed. I felt compelled to write my personal experiences and hoped we would find a common language for ourselves and our sons and daughters. I remember the expression: The personal is political-

I hadn't wanted my mother to know about the book after was published. I couldn't bear to hurt her. when she and her sisters had asked me about it, I lied. Of course she found out anyway and was hurt by my words. One of my brother's picked her up at the college where she worked and heard her shrieking and crying out so loud he called an ambulance to take it to the hospital.

I told and even now I am afraid to speak too honestly, too loudly. I had always taken responsibility for her hurtful behavior toward me because I was stronger. After I told a social worker what was happening in our house, and my siblings and I were placed in different homes and institutions. Mother was given visiting rights to see me. Her husband and she were allowed to visit the others. She never missed visiting her children- once a month for one hour. She was burdened with loss, and I was responsible. It had become my duty to comfort her. Our drama was written I into forms, page after page, by the state of California.

On the day I visited she looked so small in her little pink dress with flowers on it- Her hair like fathers moving with the slightest breeze. When I lived with her she made my dresses with underwear to match. She cooked our meals carefully, following the food plans of the day. But the state took her children away and put them in institutions in Foster Homes. She never drank, swore, smoked or used drugs.

In 1955, my mother had three small children and me. I was disabled from a fall and spent nearly a year in a body cast. She used her hands to remove impacted feces from my rectum after someone told her I would die if I couldn't move my bowels. We were living in housing projects near the naval air base in Alameda. We accepted the fact that navy planes were allowed to swoop down and drop fake bombs on the buildings, playgrounds and schools. First there were sirens then planes then bombs made of paper with Japanese writing. The projects were crowded places with the angry people.

There was a large photograph of mother's husband on the wall. He looked mild, like a professor smiling down on us. He was wearing a gray sweater with a bow tie. He wore horned rimmed glasses that didn't disguise his blind eye, brought on by attacks from brutal father, he was blinded in his right eye and lost a hearing in his right ear.

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SUMMARY: For the first time an abused child tells her own story in her own words.
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September 12, 1956

CONCERNING: LINDA DOE, Age 12

Linda has remained in juvenile Hall since a warrant was issued for her detention.

REASON FOR HEARING: On a petition alleging the home is unfit due to cruelty by the mother and a supplementary petition alleging lewd and lascivious conduct by the stepfather.

REFERRAL: During the week of August 6, 1956, the wife of Alameda County's Chief Probation Officer reported that she observed Linda Doe with a black eye which the mother, Mrs. Crude, had admitted causing; that this was but one of many indications of neglect and abuse of this child.

On August 9, a Deputy called at the Crude home and was told by Mrs. Crude and Linda that the girl's injured eye was the result of an unintentional slip while Mrs. Crude was meting out deserved physical punishment. During this interview the Deputy managed to talk with Linda alone and was told by the child that she was unhappy at home because of her stepfather's sexual advances toward her.

On August 13, the Deputy found Linda home alone. She said her mother had gone to Los Angeles leaving three younger children with their maternal aunt, that she had been left with Mr. Crude for three days and that she expected her mother home in a few hours.

On August 14, a call was made on Mrs. Crude to discuss plans for Linda. Mrs. Crude was not receptive to suggestions. A petition and warrant were then issued.

PREVIOUS HISTORY: In February 1941, Helda Crude was

brought to the attention of the juvenile Probation Offices by her mother. Her mother described her daughter as mentally retarded due to a head injury at the age of eight, that she was about 5 months pregnant by Philip Turner with whom both Helda and her mother opposed marriage. They asked for assistance in entering Helda in the Salvation Army Home. In a change of mind, Helda married Philip Turner but separated a month later. Nothing further was heard from the family for four and one-half years. A complaint was then received from a neighbor to the effect that Helda was neglecting and abusing her two children, Georgie, 5 and Linda, 2. Specifically, the neighbor stated that the two children were tied in bed about twenty-four hours of the day, that the boy was suspected of having tuberculosis and the girl was kept in the same room with him, that the little girl had been severely whipped on at least two occasions and that Mrs. Crude appeared to be a mental case.

A Deputy called at the home, found the children confined to a harness-like arrangement and insisted on their release. The Deputy noted the children's hunger, the unsanitary conditions and the mother's emotional instability. Further inquiry revealed that until about a year earlier the children had been cared for by others: Georgie, by his grandmother, but later joining Linda in a foster home.

After the Crudes' marriage, the children joined them. In spite of several neighbors urging Mrs. Crude to get the youngsters out of doors, etc., the mother continued with her own means of controlling them, keeping

them on leashes when she left them in the house. Georgie was noted to be very nervous and to have very poor coordination. The two children were declared wards of this Court June 24, 1946 and committed to the DeFremery Home for Children. On Thanksgiving Day, five months later, Mrs. Crude took Linda for a one day visit. When she returned the child at 7 pm, Linda was wearing only a coat. Mrs. Crude explained that Linda had got the rest of her clothes wet while washing dishes. The girl was confined to the infirmary with a cold for three days.

On January 10, 1947 Georgie's father was given the boy's guardianship.

On February 28, 1947 Linda was released to her mother and step-father. Supervision by the juvenile Probation Office continued. There was seeming improvement in the mother's care. However, by September 1949, neighbors were again complaining, this time about Linda. They described her as sexually aggressive. Removal of Linda from the home was again considered. The mother's interest seemed spasmodic and superficial. The mother was reported to be having an affair with a man in the vicinity. Some psychological help was obtained for Linda. Later, after some improvement was observed, Linda's matter was dismissed.

Helda's mother, Mrs. Turner, was born in the southern part of the USA and came from Irish, Dutch and English ancestry who had migrated to several states and Indian reservations in the west, and north to Washington. Mrs. Turner's earliest memories were of the homestead up in Washington where her father decided to go. The many members of Mrs. Turner's family were short and stocky with red faces. There were many clans of them dotting the map. They moved around so much it amazes me that they ever kept track of one another.

Helda was the middle child of a very large family of girls. They were all short and stocky with red faces. Helda was born in Los Angeles, and grew up during the depression. Poverty was nothing new to Mrs. Turner or her mother before her; it was a way of life. You wished for something better but of course it never came. If something better did come it was hard to know what to do with it.

Mrs. Turner moved to Oakland when Helda was about fourteen. They lived close to several other very large families. When Helda, who'd dropped out of school by then, got pregnant at fifteen Mrs. Turner didn't know what to do. Mrs. Turner always thought Helda was such a problem anyway. Helda never fit in anywhere-that's what she used to say. Helda and Phil were buddies. They used to have races with each other to the shipyards, to see who could run faster, then run back to the house. Phil had dropped out of school too; both of them had odd jobs. They liked to take their friends out for a coke or sit around on someone and roof and bullshit. They'd sit up there until long after dark and talk about movie stars and teachers they had had. They thought Phil was Helda's cousin, but no one was really sure, since in Mrs. Turner's family, paternity was never a sure thing. But just in case Phil was Helda's cousin, Mrs. Turner thought she'd better put a stop to their seeing each other. I never understood that, since cousins were marrying cousins everywhere you looked in Mrs. Turner's family. Anyway, Helda and Mrs. Turner fought

about Helda's buddy Phil until Helda moved out and moved in with Phil, who lived in the basement of his house, with many brothers and sisters.

Helda got pregnant and had Georgie. Phil told Helda there were bigger and better things in Ohio and bought an old car then took the three of them to Ohio. Georgie was sick all the time and in and out of the hospital. Phil found himself a girl friend and left Helda alone. She had a sick baby and was abandoned by the only friend she had. She went back to California by bus from Ohio with a guitar strapped on her shoulder, a baby on her hip and a bundle of clothes.

She went back to live with Mrs. Turner, who thought of her as a burden, and so did her sisters. They told her she should get married again since she couldn't find a job. She was just too expensive and too much bother to have around. She struggled for several months to live with her family. But after she discovered she was pregnant again she went to Los Angeles, leaving Georgie with her older sister so she could have the next baby at the Salvation Army Home for Unwed Mothers.

Helda mentioned scrubbing floors there and eating loads of vitamins and not being able to adjust to institutional life. Good girls didn't get pregnant in those days. If they fucked they didn't tell. If they got raped it was their own damned fault. Having a kid without being married was bad no matter how you looked at it.

I was conceived in the back seat of a car near the Pacific Ocean, or so I've been told. I've spent many a day fantasizing about the father I must have somewhere. I was sure he was a rich handsome prince or a famous movie star. I'd look for his name in the phone book of almost every town I ever went to. But Helda said that name probably wasn't his real name and it probably wasn't. I dreamed about meeting this dashing older man who was fabulously wealthy and looking all over for the daughter he once had.

I was shaken into cruel reality one day when Helda told me my father was a rapist, that this man had raped her in a car near the ocean while her younger sister screamed and watched. I'm still looking for that prick, goddamn it, but the fantasies are over. Helda attempted three unsuccessful abortions. I arrived on time, forcing my way from Helda's body, alive, naked, screaming, alone, and female-the illegitimate child of the state.

Helda decided not to have me adopted out. Or maybe she never really "decided" anything but simply and naively just continued to lead her life no matter how complicated. She was sent to a Wage Home by the state, who had decided she was a wayward girl. And that's what the state called her ever after.

An old man in the Wage Home used to chase her around and pinch her ass, grabbing when she wasn't looking. It seems everywhere she went-and she moved a lot-people didn't want noise after a certain time. So she would hold her hand over my mouth until I was asleep, or so she told me. At one point she went back to her family and her father tossed her and her two kids out, but I don't know why. She went to a boarding house where she slept on a mat full of bed bugs with Georgie, and I slept on a bundle of rags in a dresser drawer.

When I was about six months old Helda found a foster home for Georgie and me, and she'd come to visit on weekends. She was a welder in the shipyards during that time. She met Lester on some ship and married him. Her first husband, cousin Phil, filed a claim of child abuse, saying Helda and Lester beat us-Georgie and me-and would leave us in a room without feeding us and tie us up so we wouldn't get into anything. We were bruised and battered when the police came in a patrol car around midnight and took us to jail. Jail was where they put protective custody children. From there we went to some boarding home.

A long dark tunnel with voices bouncing off the side of its colorless walls, My female body small and helpless, reaching out for strength and order. Large female bodies without faces, speaking loudly in the darkness. A lone crib in a large empty room. Am I the only child in a crib? I am the only child in my world. Why are they angry? What are they shouting at me for? A woman carried me to a room with a long table. I sit on hooks to reach the table. And the giant children laugh at me. I cry, and try to use the huge forks and spoons beside the huge plate. The spoon is heavy-I drop it-the monsters laugh again-I cry again -a sand box and swings-a fence-a pony on the other side of the fence-a group of children rushing out through the gate to see the pony-"Stay!" "You're too small "and the monsters laugh when a faceless woman grabs me.

Georgie always seemed so big; he was two years older than I. Some women took us for a ride in a car with a few other children. I switched on the car light. The car stopped-tension filled up the air-we were all afraid. „, Who turned the light on?"

I didn't say anything. I never spoke a word until I was three.

Georgie said, "I did."

"If you do it again I'll beat you!"

We drove a while longer and I turned the light on again. The car stopped and a woman pulled Georgie from the car and spanked him. I watched, frightened. Georgie was a brave little boy.

I knew all about social workers. Social workers were women who worked for the government, lived in fancy offices, wore snazzy clothes, drove new cars and had lots of money for trips to Europe. Or social workers sat in offices with files piled on their desks and drove to foster homes and institutions and went to court then went home because they had one. These dolled-up ladies would visit people on welfare then talk about them later at the water cooler: "You should have seen the trash in that place, why that's grounds to remove the children."

"Well that's nothing, you should have seen the place I was in if you think that was bad. . . ." Then they would go home and call their travel agent. But they would stop long enough to see how great a shadow they could cast on the people. Then would take a paycheck and pass on by, saying, "I'm only doing my job I'm only doing my job."

I still clearly remember the last time I saw Georgie. A woman put him on a table to tie his shoe while I stood with a group of children watching a couple in the doorway. They each took one of his hands and I didn't see him again for fourteen years.

I was sent back to live with Helda and her new husband. I learned to call them Mommy and Daddy, like Dick and Jane in my first grade reader. But not like Dick and Jane because we lived in the projects. Helda had another baby by this time, named Tommy; but she missed Georgie something awful and she cried and carried on about him until she saw him again when I did, fourteen years later. Maybe three letters were sent from Florida to acknowledge Georgie was still alive. But Tommy was Georgie all over again. Helda pampered and spoiled him. Lester beat and abused us both.

Helda took me to San Francisco. She looked in her purse for some money to pay a clerk and I walked out of the store, I was in old Japanese town. After some time I realized I was lost and tried to find Helda. I went into every store to ask if they'd seen her. I kept swallowing so I wouldn't cry, because someone had told me I was a big girl and when big girls cry people laugh. No one knew where Helda was. Each store would send me to the next store. By this time the police had been alerted. I walked up some steps where an old man with a goatee and a manchu mustache spoke to me in what I guess was Japanese. Then he took my hand and sat me down and gave me some candy. He went inside for a while and came out and sat with me again. A few minutes later a cop car pulled up and behind it a yellow cab with Helda inside. Helda ran towards me. "Mommie, where have you been!" I demanded as she grabbed me up in her arms. She told me about the evils of the world. Unfortunately the world became more tolerable than home.

The housing project we lived in was built during WWII for all the people who moved into the area at that time. Our building looked like a long box. It was two stories high and twice as long as it was wide. Eight families lived in each building. We could take the wooden mailboxes from the wall, and climb inside and watch the rats and roaches race around. My world was always separate from adults.

I was an independent angry totally uncivilized little beast. Tommy was always sick with asthma so every day I teased him and beat him up. A Mexican family with ten kids lived upstairs from us. They had a daughter my age and we exchanged already chewed bubble gum. Her two older brothers were *Pachucos*. They wore their thick black hair slicked back on their heads and a gold earring in one ear. They were sort of a gang of outlaws. All I ever understood about it was that you had to be Mexican to belong.

There was a woman who lived next door who named both her daughters Carol because she liked the name. A couple lived next to the Mexican family with a little child and once they fought all night breaking windows, tossing furniture across the room at one another till we heard gun shots and one of them lay dead. Helda took their little girl for a few days until the grandmother came for her.

We were all niggers but the people with the darkest skin lived in another part of the projects. My first grade class was the first one in that area that had integration. The teacher tried to stagger us around the room so we looked salt-and-peppery. I sat next to a kid who opened his pants and played with himself all day. His sister and I were friends. Their big sister used to harass me for going into their courtyard, she'd say, "Hey girl your momma let you come over here? You better go back before she comes and whips you!" I told her my momma didn't care and go bother someone else who's momma did.

Everyone in the projects had jobs with the government. Usually they worked for the Naval air station near by. The Naval officers lived in real houses next to our projects. I made friends with one of their kids and Tommy and I would go watch their t. v. Not many people, including us, in the projects had phones or cars let alone t. v. The project women washed their clothes in tubs while the officers' wives sent their clothes out. Tommy and me always liked and were affected by westerns and cops and robbers on t. v. because that's about all they showed.

Helda would throw me out in the morning with my lunch and she'd let me in at night. She had Tommy to worry about, plus her pains past and present, and I only added to them. When she was pregnant she would lock herself in the house and just weep and weep. As soon as Lester would come back from work he'd beat me as part of his routine. I managed to get to school most every day. I had crushes on one gang of boys after another. I had few girl friends. I thought girls were cowards. The fellas and I played in empty fields, railroads and abandoned factories; and I still don't know how I stayed alive so long.

Helda was a Southern Baptist but since Lester was a Catholic Tommy and I became Catholics. I went to catechism and mass every week. I'd make up confessions for the priest that I thought he could handle. And I didn't think he could handle the fact that I was an eight-year-old hooker. I didn't mind going to the children's mass because I went alone; it was when we all went together that it was a disaster. Through all my time growing up there was nothing more depressing than family outings. Everyone fights, plays dress up, and hates one another.

I was the terror of the neighborhood and everybody knew it. When I was about five I dragged a screaming child aged two by the arm across a rocky field. I delighted in her fear of me. I'd kill sparrows with a slingshot and pull their little bodies apart with the aid of a rock so I could see what was inside of them. I examined the parts of dead cats that were lying around. I fucked little boys and gave blowjobs for little or nothing if they promised not to piss in my mouth.

Helda was in a dilemma over my behavior. Not only did the neighbors complain constantly but also the social worker kept coming around asking how I was doing. The mothers told her what I was doing: they told her I was sexually attacking their children. But the mothers all refused to testify in court. Their refusal was not out of love of Helda or me (the court would have taken me out of her custody) but from fear of their lives being exposed.

While I was being possessed by the devil my little brother was an angel. He was very blond, frail and afraid of everything. If he breathed wrong he'd catch a cold or break out in a rash. He'd cry if someone said boo to him. When I took him on my wild escapades, he'd cry because he was so scared. I hated his weakness and would beat him for it. Everyone called him a sissy. Everyone called me a brat that needed a good beating. Helda, overwhelmed by my behavior, would beat me and lock me in a room. When she went out with her boy friend, she'd leave me with Lester-but sometimes take Tommy because she didn't want Lester to hurt him. After Helda was gone, Lester would come in my room to jerk off or do the number of other things he seemed to find pleasurable, but which frightened me.

I liked to hop the freight train that rolled past the projects. I'd run after a moving box-car, grab the ladder and swing from it until it stopped at the water of the Embarcadero. Sometimes I'd drag Tommy along. We'd rob candy or soda from the local stores. We robbed anything we felt was important to us.

I had a fascination for fire. I conned Tommy once into setting a trailer on fire with paper torches. Then I sat on the curb with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood saying; "I wonder how it happened? I wonder how it happened?" And watched the fire trucks put out the flames.

Another time we broke into Helda's boy friend's house and turned over chairs, tore sheets off the bed, pulled drawers out and stole his money. Tommy finked, so I was beaten with a strap and locked in my room for days, only coming out to eat and go to school. Tommy was such a fink.

At dinner we were expected to sit up straight and eat properly. If we weren't eating with what Lester considered good manners he'd reach his hand across the table and slap us. He'd put a board against our backs so we wouldn't slouch. Lester could hardly wait to get home and find an excuse to start beating on us.

Every night after dinner I was sent to my room with a pot to piss in so I wouldn't disturb anyone later on. My room was also used as a pantry to store dry goods, so I just had room enough for a bed. I'd stay in my room and imagine myself as some heroic person who saved others from harm. I'd imagine I was in control of the whole world.

I was sent home from kindergarten for masturbating. When we all sat in a circle I'd lift up my dress and stick my hands in my pants. No one really minded except the adults.

Once a week the school would have an air raid. A siren would go off and we'd jump up and hide under our desks while the teacher told a convincing story of how the bombs were coming. No real bombs ever came. I really don't remember who was supposed to be bombing us. Since we lived near an air base, there were always air raids. Planes would skim the rooftops and drop huge bundles of paper with Japanese writing on them. The paper floated from the sky like snow.

I stole something from a supermarket and decided to stage a big get-away, so I ran outta the store and kicked a kid in the groin and stole his bike. He was one of those officers' kids. Two cop cars followed me home.

I ran and hid under the bed. Helda groaned loudly when she heard what had happened, and the neighbors all stood around the cops wondering what the little brat had done this time. The next day I had to go to the police station where some cop told me how lucky I was this was my first offense because if it wasn't "the Woman" would talk to me, and she was real mean.

Helda's mother, Mrs. Turner, paid for my dancing lessons. She hoped I would start behaving like Shirley Temple, civilized. We'd perform for various organizations. Everything was fine until I kicked the teacher for not giving me a gold star. I wasn't allowed to return. Mrs. Turner lived in another part of the projects with another daughter. I would stay overnight with her now and then. She'd lay me in bed next to her, holding me very close to her huge breasts and tell me stories about when she was a little girl on the homestead and about her Indian grandmother. She'd brag to all the neighbors about how she never had any trouble with me and never had to spank me either. When I was still small enough, Mrs. Turner would fill the kitchen sink with warm water and bathe me. I still hear her high voice rambling on and on about the outdoor tubs when she was a little girl and how I shouldn't pull the plug and let the water down the drain. Her face was my face many years away from that time; and she washed our face with such tenderness.

I would see first Mrs. Turner's large shoes, then her long printed dress, with the hem slightly above a white slip. Her large breasts lay across her short waist, even when she stood up. Finally, I remember her face with its many lines.

Linda: Grandma, bow come you don't gotta house? *Mrs. Turner:* Why, this is my house!

"This is Auntie's house. When I was in school we read about this here little girl who went through a forest to see her grandma and she brought her all these goodies, ya know?" Mrs. Turner was stirring something on the spotless stove. One of her daughters ran through the room saying goodbye, going to work at the shipyard.

I kept talking: "So anyways that there grandma just laid in bed in her own little house, with trees and all kinds of things like that and and and . . ."

"Well, now, if that don't sound like Little Red Riding Hood. You're not telling me about that wolf who ate grandma, are ya?" I nodded, with one finger in my mouth.

"That grandma, she shouldna been living alone in the first place."

Mrs. Turner took me to the Pacific Ocean once. I can still see our feet in the salty wake. She saved bottles of water from different oceans from different parts of the country. Her husband died when I was small of some natural cause.

I was baptized Catholic, and made my First Holy Communion when I was eight years old. We were all dressed like miniature brides and grooms. The little girls all wore white dresses and veils. I dropped my white rosary beads in the mud but grabbed them up just as the procession was starting. The mud splashed all over my dress. I was the first one in line because I was short, and the nuns gasped when they saw me. I made my First Holy Communion not because I could recite my catechism but because I could steal. I had stolen gold stars and put them on my lessons without anyone seeing me. The nuns seemed pleased at my progress. The older I got, the angrier I got.

Our gang had rock fights with kids from other schools. We'd set up territories and use the lids of garbage cans as shields. We never fought over things or for things; we just fought.

My fourth grade teacher left her watch on her desk, and when she turned her back I put it in my pocket. She knew I'd taken it. She took me on her lap and told me she wouldn't punish me if I'd just give it back. I'd heard that one somewhere before. Instead, I gave it to a priest at church and told him I found the watch in the pews. Well, he was delighted.

I never believed anyone when they said they wouldn't blame me for something. Once they get what they want from you they're out to get you.

In the fifth grade I drew a picture of a man with a huge erection and no clothes on, with a hat in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other. He was standing in front of a door and a woman was standing on the other side, opening it. The woman was nude, too, and the man with the huge erection was saying, in a balloon over his head, "Wanna fuck, baby?" My teacher did not accept it. She had expected me to do an art project. I was promptly sent to the principal's office.

Our gang used to dress up in old Halloween costumes and put on plays for the kids in the neighborhood. We'd put up curtains on the archway and collect two cents from everyone before starting. I also played good craps so between this and my little sexual bouts with the gang I made out all right. Tommy and I'd go to the officers' homes and beg for money for our poor family and they'd give us returnable bottles. We'd turn 'em in and keep the money. I had a terrific pitching arm and played ball better than most of the boys but so did Angel May Thomas.

My best trick was a little fat kid with a paper route. I'd meet him in an abandoned factory, and he'd pay me faithfully every week after he got paid. Not meaning to brag or anything, but I musta fucked every boy in my fifth grade class.

On the railroad tracks behind the projects there was an old outhouse turned on its side and Johnnie the kid and I used to play in it. We stashed stolen goods (like comic books) there and tried to outdo each other on

who'd done the most daring things. Johnnie and I were gonna run away and live in the outhouse but he was afraid of the dark and I was afraid to stay out there alone. Not because of what might happen to me then but what woulda happened to me after.

One day we went on one of those dreadful family outings with everyone dressed up and packed into the car. We went to some place near Concord to visit Helda's sister. She lived in this house in the woods and on one side was a whole field of mustard greens. An old white mare wandered around behind the house. Lester was along, his usual pissy self, yelling at us like we were animals:

Don't do that!

Stop!

NO!

Get down!

Shut-up!

That brat never does what she's told to! You can beat her and lock her in her room she still doesn't listen!

Yeah, yeah, big daddy why don't ya tell 'em how you came into my room last night after Helda went out with Will. But, then, isn't it perfectly natural to molest a child if your wife is running around with someone else? I hated Lester. I was afraid of Lester. I use to dream about murdering him but couldn't figure out what to do with the body. I'd beg Helda to divorce him and marry Will but she'd say she owed Lester something because he took care of her when she had nothing. I should respect him because he fed us.

The adults went inside after we ate, the younger children, too. My cousin Chuckie and I were playing in the big oak tree. I had been warned to stay out of that tree, or else. Tommy was down on the ground, begging Chuckie to help him climb the tree. But I was up in the tree. I had also dragged a plank of wood up and had balanced it on a couple of limbs. I could see the white horse and the field of mustard greens. I was away from nagging adults. I was content. I moved a little on the board and felt myself off balance then

falling

falling

falling rolling in midair

and falling the earth numbing my body as they met crashing against each other. A voice I know was mine screamed from some other place and the echo boomeranged back and forth around me.

A woman's voice: I told you not to climb that tree. Does anything hurt?

No momma. I screamed again.

A male voice: Well, if nothing hurts then goddamn it get up and quit your crying!

Helda: Okay now you heard your father, get up.

Helda's sister: Wait a minute Helda, if she doesn't hurt maybe something is really wrong.

Ah, my, ah, my back hurts.

Lester: Oh shit just what we need. Get up and stop yer bawling!

Momma! Momma! Momma!!

Helda's sister: Helda you take one arm and I'll take the other and we'll have her lie down for awhile. Maybe it's just a bruise.

They helped me into the house. The bed was too soft and every move caused more pain, more pain in my back and left side.

Lester: It's her own goddamn fault we told her to stay away from that tree.

Every move was more painful than the last one. I could not sit straight when they put me in the car. My little sister and Tommy sat in the back and were pleased their tyrant older sister was stricken down. They were bold, telling me to move, give them more room; proud of themselves.

Once we got back, Lester forced some whiskey down me and cursed me for not drinking it fast enough. The next day Helda ask Pearl's father to take us to the hospital. They X-rayed me and admitted me for a broken hip. I was wheeled to the operating room where one of the nurses did a hula dance for me and gave me a shot and told me to sing *Oh Susanna* with her. I floated into a deep sleep before the end of the first stanza.

I woke up with a body cast on. I stayed in the hospital for about a week, drugged and in shock. The doctor told me I'd be in the cast for about six weeks. I was in it for close to eight months. They sent me back home to my little room.

Helda's sister gave me a radio, because she felt guilty. We'd never had one. The Salvation Army gave me comic books. I learned a horror of spiders. I watched spiders dropping from the ceiling to my cast; I wasn't able to reach, to push them away. Mice still gnawed at the sheet rock that walled in the room.

My friends came to see me once but it was useless of them to bother. I was no fun anymore and couldn't do anything. I lay in bed hour after hour and listened to the foghorns, children playing, cars racing by the building. It was summer and Helda would go out into the courtyard to visit her friends. I would be alone, often, for hours until my room was dark. There was no way to turn on the light. She tried; she did what she thought she was supposed to; **or**, maybe, she didn't think. She'd give me the bedpan and tell me how so and so's kid was run over and killed and how lucky I was to be alive. Some drunk was always killing kids on that block.

I got very gloomy and distant. I was certain I'd be in bed the rest of my life. I'd have no friends. My room stank of urine and of rot from the cast and my body was covered with sores.

.....

I sat in a room off the courtroom waiting for the criminal trial to start and to be called to the stand to testify against Lester. A half dozen adults were throwing questions at me. I looked out of the window. We were on the eighth floor and I could see, below, human beings pacing up and down the sidewalk. People were creatures who left gray cement behind them wherever they went. I wanted to leave, but my body was forcing me to stay. I answered the questions mechanically. Someone swung the door open and announced that Lester had confessed, which meant I didn't have to testify. "He confessed" means that he pleaded guilty to touching me on the breast and fondling my pubic hair three times in the, last month. He said he never had an erection or ejaculation in front of me. He told them it all happened because I needed help doing some physical exercises. It was all a lie. He didn't have to help me, and the fact that his lie was accepted as a reason for molesting me confirmed the male power structure: men can control themselves until women become sexual to them, then they "rightfully" loose all control in order to convince women they are in control. An accepted contradiction.

Helda stayed by his side and supported him. She had to make a choice, and he was her choice. They swore to everyone they loved each other deeply. Lester was shipped off to a prison farm for first offenders and Helda suffered a mild nervous breakdown after the younger children were taken into custody and rationed out to homes. If she stayed with Lester, she could not have her children; if she did not stay with Lester, she could not have her children either because she had no way of supporting them or herself except

to go back to the projects and live on welfare. Mrs. Parrot convinced her to sign her children over to the state. Since none of us were allowed to be adopted we were still Helda's property, and Helda was Lester's property.

I was never in Urchin Hall with my sister and baby brother, but occasionally Tommy and I would cross paths. I never forgot it was my fault they didn't have their home anymore. If Helda was "irresponsible," as I believed, then it must be I who was responsible for what happened to the younger children.

The baby went through a series of foster homes before an interested childless couple took him in after he was five years old. My sister was placed in a home and lives there to this day. Tommy was placed with his father's sister and was sexually molested by her husband; then, after a number of foster homes, he was sent to a Catholic boys' school. When I was about five years old, Helda was given custody of me after Georgie, her first child, went to Florida with his father.

Lester assured the courts he would not allow Helda to mistreat me anymore. He'd keep her in line. As a matter of fact, he would even make her read good books, like *Time* and the *Reader's Digest*. Helda swore to be supermom plus an excellent housekeeper as well.

About five years later, when I was ten, we moved from the WWII housing projects to a large house in Piedmont, on a "fashionable" street. Lester had made a deal with a dirty old man from the stamp club he belonged to. The old man gave Lester the down payment on the house in exchange for a room there for the rest of his life. Helda, my little sister and I were included in this deal and he managed to get to each of us when he could. I was scared shitless of this old man. On the street he was a kindly old gentleman; in the house he was a beast. When I was in a body cast, he'd come into my room and squeeze my breasts and kiss me with his shriveled, toothless old mouth. I was embarrassed, and there was no one I could trust enough to talk to about it. When Lester was at work, the old man would ball Helda or take my sister to his room and tell her sex stories and finger fuck her and feed her candy. Then, after the old man went out, Lester would come in for his daily ration. A tutor came, too, during that time. She would ask me what I knew, then would go have coffee with Helda and the old man she thought was my grandfather. I'd lie quietly in my room and hope for Mary to come down from Heaven and save me. The fuse was blown in that part of the house, so I was forever lying in the dark. I hated them but I couldn't stop them. I was the child bride of my mother's husband who had chosen to share me with his boarder. I was ten years old.

When the doctor came to saw the body cast off, Tommy and my little sister were there to watch. I was afraid to move my legs. I was shaky, and it took several days to get enough courage to put my legs over the side of the bed. Every move made me feel like I was going to fall. Under the cast my body was covered with a thick layer of dead skin, which frightened me.

I went from swinging my legs over the side of the bed to a wheelchair and then crutches. Helda enrolled me in a summer camp for handicapped children. The camp was on a lake in Oakland and a cab took me there and back every day, compliments of some charitable organization. In camp, I made friends with children who'd been victims of every type of physical disease. They were blind and deaf, in wheelchairs, or wore helmets to keep their skulls safe. They were all races and both sexes. There was a sort of rhythm among us, since what one child couldn't do another could; and we became close in a short time. I never saw them again after the summer was over but I know some of them must be adults by now-but adults hidden away in carefully chosen compartments, out of the space where the healthy majority moves freely.

Helda couldn't get me into a school for handicapped children, so she sent me to a Catholic school. Such was Helda's sort of reasoning. The Catholic school was a mile and a half from where we lived. I'd limp to school everyday. My hip was too weak to stand the full weight of my body. I was late every day and would have to limp in front of the' staring eyes of the class to my desk. My one rumpled school uniform was the only clothing I had from that time until I was returned to the state.

"Why aren't there any Negroes in this school?" I asked. I'd never been to a segregated school before and it seemed strange. The nun I asked looked at me as though she had expected a dumb question like that to come from me and said, "The parents wouldn't like it and it would give the school a bad name." Ask a stupid question....

A nun who taught piano was curiously interested in me; and, although I didn't take piano lessons, she'd ask me to wait for her to finish a lesson and she'd spend some time sitting and talking with me, smiling warmly and speaking in a soft voice. She asked why I limped and I told her. I reacted to her interest in me by developing a tremendously painful crush on her. I wanted to be a nun so we could be together forever and ever. She'd give me holy cards and I'd turn them over and over in my hands at home and remember the exact spot she touched. She would tell me I had a lot locked up inside of me and I should try and tell her what it was. She decided we needed each other since her feast day and my birthday both fell on the third of October. She didn't understand my interest in St. Maria Goretti, who was stabbed to death by a rapist. I finally broke down and told her about the old man. The nun called Helda, who gave me a key to the room I shared with my sister; then pulled enough strength together to ask Lester to get the old man out of there. I'd told a nun at school: they wondered what I would say next. Lester was in a dilemma but he knew that the best thing was for the old man to leave. But the old man knew he had Lester up shit creek; and when he moved out he put a lien for several thousand dollars on the property and tried to sue for room and board until the day he died, and I don't know why someone didn't kill him.

Helda brought a formal complaint against the old man, and a cop came to the house. The cop couldn't do anything though unless I remembered what day and time the guy touched me. Otherwise, he could dream up an alibi. Then the cop thought I had just *wished* the old bastard had made love to me; and he began questioning my four-year old sister. He decided a child that age didn't lie, so he told Helda this would be a horrible thing to put a four-year-old child through-going to court and all-so Helda finally dropped the whole thing and the old prick continued to sue, but I never saw him again. I hope he died a painful death.

Every week Helda and I went by train over the Bay Bridge to U. C. Medical Center in San Francisco, where I was displayed, poked and examined as a scientific product. They examined me on a table in front of an audience full of doctors. They poked, asked curt questions, then poked some more. Sometimes a doctor in the audience would raise his hand and ask a question in medical jargon and the doctor in charge would respond in the same language. I was extremely tense. I would sit on a table stripped to some makeshift pants in front of strange people who asked me where it hurt without regard for my feelings. I had just acquired this new body with full breasts and hips and pubic hair; and before I could fully explore it myself and feel confident with it, a whole population of males had experienced it in some way or another.

The freaks in white gowns decided I should have an operation. Helda stayed in the ward and waited for me to return from the operating room. A pin was put in my hip to give it strength. There were three other kids in the ward with me. One kid's brother would come to see her but visit with me instead. He was sixteen and we seemed to have a lot to talk about. He'd push me in my wheelchair and sneak me to another floor where we'd look out the window and admire the view. While he was a rather immature sixteen, I was in full bloom at twelve. We got along wonderfully until his aunt came to visit and told me I should eat more because the kid liked fat girls. That finished it. For some reason we couldn't be friends anymore.

I was happy at the hospital and didn't want to leave, but after a month Helda took me back to the terrible place that I would live in for several more months. My first night back was an example of what went on all the time. It was cold in the house because the heat wasn't working, and we were having dinner. Helda and Lester sat at opposite ends of the table and my sister and Tommy and I sat around the table. The baby was in the sunroom off the dining room. A piece of plywood, three feet high, separated the two rooms. Lester did not allow anyone to speak at dinner, including Helda, who, he felt, had nothing to say anyway. Nearly every night the baby, who couldn't see over the partition, and who was in the dark, would start screaming and scream through the meal. I'd hold my food in my mouth, wishing I could spit it out somewhere; my heart would pump wildly. At last Lester would jump up from his chair and yell, "Stop it, goddamn it!" Then the back of his hand would crash against the tender skin of my year-old brother's face; and his little body would stiffen as he slid to the floor; and there would be more screams of fear and pain shooting through my spine. "Brat!" Lester would mutter, and sit back down and continue to eat his meal.

Even though I didn't go to the Catholic school anymore-not since my operation-I still wore my school uniform. There was nothing else for me to wear. The same tutor returned. Helda told her the old man had died, and they had tea together after the tutor had asked me what I knew. One day Helda came home with some clothes she'd just bought with money her boyfriend had given her. They were all for my sister.

Helda showed them to me excitedly, as though I were a neighbor or a visitor who had dropped in. I excused it, thinking maybe I'd spent too much of everyone's money already: although the Shriners paid for part of it, I had to see a physical therapist and go swimming twice a week. But we were becoming an eyesore to the neighborhood. Children would ask Tommy and me if we ever took a bath and if Helda ever cleaned the house and why the weeds were left growing in the yard. The chief probation officer for the county lived next door with his wife and mother-in-law. They had a housekeeper and a gardener.

Helda beat me up because I wanted to watch a t.v. program she didn't like. She punched me in the face and caused my face to swell and blacken. We screamed and shouted at one another and she chased me with a butcher knife but managed to miss me and stab the wall instead. The neighbor next door heard Helda say, "I'll blacken the other one and then you won't be so pretty!" and told the police who sent a social worker out to check up on my black eye. The worker sat with me on the front steps and managed to get me to tell her about Lester. She said I would have to leave the house, and did I know of any relative who would have me. The only person I wanted to live with didn't have a home, and that was my grandmother. The social worker said she would not do anything right then; that she wouldn't make arrangements until I had told Helda about what Lester did to me. Because my grandmother didn't have a home, she didn't qualify to take me. For some reason she lived with friends and relatives, always staying in a room in someone else's house. Helda's family never liked me to begin with. I was always a source of shame to them.

Before I could tell Helda what was happening, she announced that she was going to Los Angeles with the three younger children and that I was to stay and look after Lester. I became his maid and mistress; and he decided we should get married as soon as I was old enough. He was small and hunched over and had black crooked teeth. The worker came while Helda was in L. A. and wanted to know if I had told Helda and if I was all right. I told her I wanted to leave then and she said she'd be back when Helda came back and that there were things she had to do first. Then she left, and Lester called my name from his room.

I couldn't think straight. I wasn't able to concentrate on anything and was unable to read because the sentences would become words and the words, letters, which floated around and made no sense. I wasn't able to make friends because other children had trouble relating to a strange cripple child. I lived in a world vacant of feeling is what it all added up to. When people spoke to me, I'd focus on their mouths and watch their teeth moving together and know sound was coming from them but could not follow the pattern of speech. I would start to speak but couldn't finish what I wanted to say-no matter how simple. My mind would draw a blank. I'd watch people's eyes squint while they waited for my next word; then I'd withdraw. Everything around me became one-dimensional-the trees on the street were paintings and the painting of a child I had on the wall in my room became a beast staring down at me from its frame. I was afraid to stand too close to the window in my room because I knew an unknown force would push me to my death.

Everyone I ever met put Helda down in one way or another, so I hated her: because she hurt me and because others put her down. She hated me because I should never have been. I never met an American who didn't hate her mother.

Whenever Helda wasn't around, Lester would have me blow him or he'd ball me in the ass or just jerk off in front of me or have me jerk him off. He'd whisper sweet things to me while he was doing this. When Helda was around, he'd beat the hell out of me in a strange display of anger and hate. When we were alone he'd tell me he had to do that so Helda wouldn't get suspicious. But it didn't seem like a game when he'd take off his belt and beat me like a mad man. Helda interfered only once when he'd beat me bloody and blood was dripping from my mouth and from the parts of my flesh opened by the buckle. I was gasping for breath. I don't remember any reason for being beaten.

When Helda returned from Los Angeles, she wanted to know why the social worker had been there. I told her it was hard for me to talk about it and we walked to Lake Merritt at ten p. m., sat on the banks, and I told her about Lester. I imagined I saw the reflection of the school in the water and wondered what my nun was doing then. I wondered if I could join the convent at twelve. Maybe I could hide in a habit. A huge rat scurried past us.

Helda promised she wouldn't go out that night, and she didn't. Helda sat -me down before taking me to Urchin Hall the next day and told me she had lied about my having a legitimate father who had died before

I was born. She said I was a bastard and that she wanted to tell me before "they" did. She explained that she'd had to marry someone she never loved for economic reasons and all she'd ever wanted to do in her life was to have a good time.

There were days of questions and general harassing. Psychiatrists asked things like, "You really liked it, didn't you?" "You wanted him to feel you up, didn't you?" The women who asked me these questions obviously had never had it happen to them. After several court hearings Helda came to see me and said a Catholic orphanage had refused to accept me because I knew too much about sex. I did not want to go to a foster home and risk being manhandled again, so I asked to go to a girls' school.

I hated everything male; I wanted to join the convent and become a nun. A nun had been good to me and I wanted to be like her. I figured I could tolerate the priests as a necessary evil. I hated men so much that they all looked alike to me. They all had a prick and were only interested in one thing. My nun from the old Catholic school wrote to me and told me nuns didn't become nuns because they hated men; they became nuns because they loved God and God loved everyone. I had a big knot in my stomach after reading her letter. God was an old man and this nun had no idea how I felt.

Helda drove me to Urchin Hall herself.

"My husband's in love with her so I was told to bring her here," she told the woman at the door. "The woman brought us in and treated us casually. She reached in her desk and pulled out a dozen or so forms for Helda to fill out. I felt strange inside my body, the body of a woman twelve years old. In the last few days, I had been forced to grow up to my physical maturity.

"Would you like to step into the next room, dear?" I whispered yes to the woman, placed my crutches under my arms and limped past Helda, who I wouldn't see again for some time. I was led to a room where there were other children of all ages, and was told to watch t. v. We all sat in silence and watched, what I don't know. All I knew at that moment was that for the first time since I could remember I did not feel my body was under any threat; no one would beat, rape, or molest me.

I was fed three full meals a day, plus vitamins; no one pressured or taunted me. I followed the routine mechanically, accepting passively any directions given. When asked a question, I answered in a monotone, staring straight ahead and keeping my body perfectly still. The one thing I felt strongest about was the fact that no matter what happened I never wanted to see Lester, Helda's husband, again. I also knew that any man could harm me and I didn't want to go to a foster home and risk being abused again. I was on crutches and both my eyes were blackened; one was closed. I also went to court hearing after court hearing where things that were already established had to be vindicated. I was asked the same questions over and over again. "Did he undress you?" "Where did he touch you?" "Where did you touch him?" "Did he put his penis inside of your vagina?" The conclusion seemed to be that if Lester hadn't actually fucked me, he must be psychotic. So Lester was sent to three different psychiatrists, each of whom established that he was not a sexual psychopath; so I was subtly blamed for his problem.

Mrs. Parrot drove me in the county car to the Convent of the Holy Terror. I was numbed by all the doors being locked behind me. Why? The nun took me from hallway through parlor, downstairs, upstairs, downstairs through an enormous hallway, to a cottage with thirty or so girls in it. I was still on crutches and the girls stood silent, staring at me.

I soon found out this school was like a reform school. If you weren't tough when you went in, by Christ you were when you left. We were all children being punished for what adults had done to us. It was a fad at that time for the girls to cut their arms with a piece of broken glass' The first night I was there I stared

horrified at a group of girls who sat in a corner carving their arms, sometimes licking the blood. No one was hurt; they managed to just scratch the surface. It didn't take me long to learn to cut my arm with the rest of them--or the best of them, whichever. We'd carve initials of made-up lovers.

We slept in two dorms on rows of cast-iron beds. I became very ill my first week in the convent with what was diagnosed, by the housemother, as psychosomatic, so I was sent to sleep in the infirmary which was in another building. I was alone and locked in a room. Down the hall I could hear a girl crying. She was in isolation, a little room inside a room. "Isolation" was an extreme sort of penance and girls who were out of control were sent there. I was afraid of being alone and in the dark and kept myself covered and listened to the noises around me hoping I would live until morning. The windows were barred but in the morning I tried to open them-I wanted to get out although I didn't know where I would go. I thought my grandmother would take me and no one would find me. One of the first women executed in California went to this school; she escaped and no one found her until she grew up and they got her for living with murderers. A nurse came in the morning and brought me to an office and told me to undress to the waist and a male doctor felt my breasts and I was sent back to my cottage.

There was an awful sadistic nun whose name was Mother Contrition. Fortunately for me she was the other cottage's housemother-but she was both cottages' directress, and the head of the junior side. Junior meant not quite as bad as *senior*, which had girls who were downright criminal, or so we were told. We were ordered by Mother Contrition not to speak to *those* girls. We went to the same classes together and passed each other in the halls but the rest of the time we were separated, even in the chapel. The chapel branched off three ways from the altar to make three separate chapels, one for the senior side, one for the junior side, and one for the nuns, The one altar was for the priest.

I was forever on penance, it seems. That meant I was being punished and would have to sit in a corner on a little stool and write "I must not whatever" hundreds of times. I was caught for writing a letter to a senior girl and for taking a thumbtack from the bulletin board. I also told Mother Contrition I hated her so she terrorized me ever after. She figured she'd done me a favor taking me in because I was a cripple plus she never did like girls that were there because of child molestation. One girl was raped by her father on an outing, and Mother Contrition never let her forget that it happened because she must have been asking for it.

I had a habit of rocking, which disturbed the staff since rocking had something to do with my being disturbed. The girls wanted to know why I was rocking and I told them some story that must of convinced them it was necessary 'cause I had the whole junior side rocking. Now it was one thing to rock alone but to get others to rock with me was bad news-I was put in penance and sat on a little stool facing the wall and had to write hundreds of times, "I must not rock, I must not rock." Shortly after, I was writing, "I must not rock in *penance*." There was always something: "I must not put salt in the Holy Water"; "I must not chew the Host"; "I must not refer to the nuns by their first name"; "I must not hide from the group."

Mrs. Parrot came now and then to take me to U. C. Medical Center for checkups. I used one crutch, long after I could walk all right. Mother Contrition and the girls used to harass me about it until I finally put it in the cubbyhole I was assigned to. I had three skirts, three blouses, a pair of shoes, loads of holy cards and a pair of crutches that were bought for me and that belonged to me.

When I was in penance in the cottage, I had to eat at a small table facing the wall in the dining room and also sit alone in the chapel. Fortunately a, kid by the name of Leona was on penance as much as I was. We were bonded to each other and swore never to tell on one another. The others were forever finking on each other, and on Leona and me. Leona and I'd whisper back and forth and pass notes in penance. Mother Contrition would scream my name so it sounded more like "*dirty whore*" than Linda Doe. Once she screamed my name and when I asked what I did she began badgering me with "You know what you did!" "No, honest, I don't." "Don't get smart with me Linda Doe!" So I sat in penance twice as long for something I didn't know I did and for getting smart about it. She had a face that drooped over her habit like a bull dog's, and a skinny little aide who'd once been a student there and followed her around and said, "Yes, Mother"and "No, Mother" a lot. The aide was timid and hung her head all the time and walked on her toes. The girls were forever harassing her and she'd just hang her head and walk away.

Everyone in the convent feared Mother Contrition and most of the girls kissed her ass to avoid being punished. She was the kind of tyrant who would make rules that were easiest to break and hardest to follow. She got pleasure out of punishing people. She told us over and over that the reason we were there was because we were being punished for our sins.

Our day consisted of getting up at 5:30 a.m. to the sound of the chapel bells clanging the Angelus. We'd jump out of our beds and kneel next to them and say a prayer then get ready for mass. We lined up to go everywhere and in the morning we'd file into the pews in chapel. We were supposed to kneel up straight and press our palms together so the tips of our fingers met. After mass we'd maintain silence and line up to go to the dining room, say grace and a few other prayers, then eat in silence. If we weren't on penance we would talk to each other for about five minutes before silence was enforced until noon. We each had a job to do in the cottage before we lined up for school. After school we sat quietly and talked if we weren't on penance-then dinner, then back to the cottage to watch t. v. before bed time, when we'd prepare for the grand event of the day: one solid hour of prayer. We'd kneel in a straight line with our heads and backs erect and our palms pressed together and say fifteen decades of the rosary plus a series of other prayers. Once someone fainted but had to be left untended until we finished praying for our sins.

At recreation we were not allowed to listen to rock music, talk about boys or the senior girls. Many of us were sexually charged up over those senior girls. The only way we got to see the senior chapel was when we went to the altar rail to receive communion.

The nuns' convent was a building next to the main building and they had a whole nother set of rules. There was a Mother Superior who we rarely saw, and many nuns who we never saw-a nun who was blind, a nun who walked up the stairs backwards, and the nun who rang the Angelus at 5:30 a.m., 12 p.m., and 6 p.m. She'd pull the rope, ringing out three bells, a pause, three more bells, a pause, and so on-and everything in the Convent of the Holy Terror would come to a roaring halt and the girls and nuns would drop to their knees and recite a prayer which started: "The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Ghost." This would be followed by a series of Hail Mary's: "*Hail Maryfullofgrace the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.* "

We saw a movie once a week in the school auditorium. The projector was operated by a nun who was nearsighted and focused the film nearsighted.

A make-shift store sat between the arcades and the main building. We were given an allowance once a month that came to something like two dollars a week. We were told to buy our own toilet articles and a few other things like yam. A lot of the girls knitted, and knitted compulsively. They asked us to give part of our allowance to some charity fund to help the convent - that kind of thing seems to make sense when you're that age. Those senior girls were not let into the store the same time we were. If they happened to be helping out with the stock, or some such thing, we were to keep our eyes lowered and our mouths shut. Who knows what we may have said to each other? One of the senior girls used to flirt with me in religion class, and we began passing rather passionate notes back and forth-we touched with our eyes. She gave me her address, 'cause I told her I was breaking outta that place and the note was confiscated by Mother Contrition, and I was in penance for a very long time.

In the early part of 1957 we were in the dining room having lunch. Leona and I were in penance, as usual, when suddenly the walls began to sway and the earth rumbled beneath our feet-AN EARTHQUAKE! Everyone was screaming and throwing herself on the ground, including the nun who was screaming to god for forgiveness of her sins. Leona and I stood motionless and watched a statue fall from the wall crashing and splintering into a million pieces. The nun threw her arms up and kept screaming to god that she wasn't ready to die and some kid threw up. When the earth finally settled, Mother Contrition stepped into the room from somewhere else and tossed her head up arrogantly and said in her loud voice, "Maybe now you'll believe there's a god!"

Leona was tall and boyish looking. She asked Mother one day if she could cut her hair. Leona's hair was down to her shoulders. Mother was feeding her cat. Mother loved her cat, so she said sweetly, "Yes, Leona, you may cut your hair." After dinner Mother Contrition stormed in the door and screamed, "Leona!" She grabbed Leona by the shoulders and forced her to her knees. Mother insisted Leona didn't have

permission to have her hair cut. While we all stood watching silently, Mother took her keys out of her pocket, a set of thirty or forty keys on a heavy chain and hit Leona on the back of the neck with them. Then Mother told her to get outside, because she was disgusting and trying to act like a boy. So Leona knelt in the fog for a couple of hours until Mother Contrition decided she could come back in. Leona crawled over to my bed and slid under the covers. "Sh-h-h. " She covered her head with the sheet. We wrapped our arms around one another, holding each other tightly. "Did you start your period, yet?" In the light from the window, I could see her eyes. The housemother was closed off in her cell between the two dormitories. Two long rows of beds were lumpy with softly snoring girls.

"Yeah, a long time ago; well, at least six months." I could feel her half-grown breast pressing against mine.

"I hate Mother Contrition."

"I know. She's too mean-I'd like to kill her."

"Let's kill her then."

"Yeah, but how?"

"Did you start your period, yet?"

"Nope, not yet, maybe I never will because I'm older than you and you did it months ago."

"Why don't we push her down the stairs?"

"Naw, she'd probably only get a bruise or something. Leona slipped back to her own bed that was across from mine.

Leona sat facing a wall in the dining room some ten feet from me and the wall I faced. The rest of the girls were sitting at little square tables slowly putting food in their mouths. Mother Contrition sat very straight in a chair on a platform overlooking all the little tables. Her eyes were on an open book in her lap.

"Pst! Linda!"

"Yeah, " I whispered back as quietly as I could, yet loud enough for Leona to hear.

"What did that senior girl say to you in that note?"

"She gave me her address so I could go to her house when I run away." My crutch leaned against the wall in front of me.

"You gonna split? Let's go together."

"Okay. Remember that movie about that guy that got outta prison in a laundry basket?"

Leona sat staring at the wall for a moment, then nodded and winked. "Ye-a-h!"

I half turned to her. "Well, I figure we'll do it this way ...

LINDA DOE!" Mother Contrition's voice stopped the whole room.

Leona walked ahead of me in line as we marched through the long corridor to mass. In the chapel, I watched her carefully, nudging her when she started to doze off. Her head would fall slightly to one side, then to the other. We had to stay awake so we could pop up on cue to either stand or kneel. I didn't want

her to get into any more trouble, since this was the first time in days that we would be excused from penance.

Once everyone finished eating, we were allowed to talk: "Hey Leona! Hey Linda! Good to see ya!" It was the Indian girl at the next table. "Hey, ya know I think those little tables at the wall were reserved just for you. " There was a swell of laughter from the girls who began gathering around us. Some of the girls stood gawking at us like it was the first time they'd ever seen us, like they didn't know we'd been sitting in the same room with them facing the wall all along.

Leona grabbed my crutch and shoved the top under some girl's chin: "Hey girl! You ever fink on me again and I'll beat yer ass with this. " The other girls gave the fink a dirty look and she backed off away from the group. We all patted brave Leona's shoulder. Leona sat up straight, pushing her half-grown breasts forward and boasted, "When I get outta this joint I'm gonna spit in that Virgin Mary's eye."

"Wow!" The fink hung back from the group with her arms folded, her lips pressed tight, her eyes squinting. Just before lunch some senior girls stopped Leona and me on the landing in the stairwell. "Hey you two! Where you going?" Leona stood up tall and tried to look as tough as they did. But we looked like meek lambs next to them. They popped their gum and talked from the side of their mouths, and wore d. a.'s (ducks ass) or let their hair all hang over one eye. They all towered over us. One girl with a d.a. grabbed my crutch, then handed it back to me. "How come you use this? Looks like you can walk to me."

" 'Cause she wants to," Leona said boldly. The girl slapped Leona's back. "Hey girl, I been hearing stories about how tough you are-that true?"

"Sure is." We all laughed. One girl, with all her hair hanging over one eye, held her hand under my chin. "Ain't she cute. Are you Leona's girl friend?"

I smiled; and innocently said "Yes."

"Ain't this little one the one Cobra's got a crush on?"

I blushed, remembering Cobra in my religion class recalling myself watching her in awe, totally intrigued by the way she slouched and popped her gum. The first time she pushed a note onto the corner of my desk, I was so excited. It said WHAT'S YOUR NAME? I'd kept that note pinned in my bra since then.

"Hey Leona, Cobra likes yer girl friend-what are you gonna do about it?"

I looked up. At the top of the stairs there was the fink leaning against the wall, studying what we were doing. My heart fell to my gut- oh shit! Now we were in real trouble. I watched her disappear through the doorway. Leona had her hand in mine and was swinging it back and forth, boasting about something with the big girls. I tugged at her and told her we'd better get out of there quick.

After school we were sitting around with the other people, who were either knitting or staring at t.v. The nun who was our housemother, and who never said much, sat reading a book in a corner away from us. The Indian girl sat on one side of Leona on the couch and I sat on the other. Some of the other girls in the room began to gather around. Leona pulled out a piece of glass she'd found in the yard at recess. She carved her whole name on her arm, stopping only long enough to lick the blood to stop the bleeding. Another girl carved the initials of her first and last name. She passed the piece of glass to me. Leona snickered. I wasn't afraid to scratch my arm; at least I didn't want Leona to think I was. I scratched slowly. A white line followed the glass on my arm. "No. Come on, you gotta cut, and make it bleed a little. " One of the girls was licking the blood on her arm where two bright red letters stood out. "You ain't chickenshit, are ya?" I scraped harder, through the hair and the thin layer of skin until I bled. I kept a stoic look on my face, and felt like I was signing a secret document. At last I had two clear letters in bright blood red on my arm. The Indian hugged me and showed me the letters and designs on her own brown arm.

A clanging of keys. We pulled our sleeves down. The housemother gathered up a bag with her things in it, greeted someone at the door, and left. Mother Contrition stomped in, her little aide on one side and the fink on the other. The fink looked very righteous.

"What's going on here?" Mother Contrition boomed. We stood, facing her. No one dared sit unless she told us we could, no matter how long it was. One of the girls started crying and said, "I scratched my arm, Mother." I was disgusted. "And you-you Linda Doe-you've been creating trouble again, haven't you?" I didn't answer. She looked at me and asked softly, "Did anyone else scratch her arm?" I didn't answer. "Did Leona?" I looked right at her and said, "No." She turned to the girl who had confessed, "Did anyone else scratch her arm?" The girl hung her head. "Yes, Leona and Linda."

"PULL-UP-YOUR-SLEEVES!" We did. Only one day out of penance-then back in again for two weeks, to write, over and over, I MUST NOT TALK TO THE SENIORS. I MUST NOT SCRATCH MY ARM. I MUST NOT LIE.

Several buses were chartered every year on Columbus Day so the girls could ride around the city like tourists. It was one of the few times I left the walls of the convent; the other times were when I went to the doctor. The girls who had been labeled "bad" were not allowed to come. The tour was about two hours long. At the time of the Columbus Day tour, Leona and I were still new at the school.

The seniors were herded to the buses before us. We waited, surrounding a life-size statue of Mary in a hallway that had stained glass windows on one side and small clear glass windows on the other. We stood very still watching the senior girls through the window boarding the buses. They were laughing excitedly, and pushing and teasing one another. "Hey, bus driver, take us through the Fillmore. I wanna see if any of my friends are there."

"Take me to the wharf. I wanna stow away on a ship." Leona stood in front of me. I watched her face, smiling; her eyes were glued to the senior girls.

Our turn came and we filed in quietly. A nun instructed us to go all the way to the back of the bus and fill the last seats up first. We were allowed to talk just above a whisper while riding around. We weren't allowed to get out of the bus. The senior girls' bus was ahead of us. All during the trip, the seniors jumped around the bus and leaned out the windows, screaming obscenities at the real tourists. Mother Contrition kept telling her aide how disgusting it was, the way those girls acted.

Leona blew on the window, then drew a picture on the glass. "I've seen all this shit before," she said. "I bet they don't take us through the Mission District. But if they do I'll show you where my grandma used to live."

"Where does she live now?"

"She's dead, but she used to live on Capp Street. Some day I'll find my mother and we'll get outta this town."

Well, I don't need a mother anymore," I said, wishing I could give away the one I had.

"Haha, looka that guy!" Some guy was marching down the street wearing kilts and blowing a bagpipe. The senior girls were now all on one side of their bus, shouting at the man, who ignored them and kept right on playing. We rode through Golden Gate Park. Leona opened her window. The stale, cool smell of Eucalyptus twisted through our nostrils. The fog rolled in from the ocean and bounced against the bus. A bellowing foghorn rang in our ears. "My grandmother brought me here when I was a little girl," I said. "Um. My grandma brought me here once when my mother was still around. I barely remember it. " Leona drifted away until I couldn't even feel her leg next to mine anymore. I didn't like her that way. I liked her with me, so I stopped mentioning my grandmother or anyone else outside the convent.

It was a special occasion, so we were in the nuns' chapel. There were two rows of seats; each lined against a wall. The chapel reeked of incense and flowers. Hundreds of candles were flickering. My feet barely touched the floor, so I kept swinging them until the nun next to me told me to stop. I bit my fingernail down so far it bled. I pressed my finger into the long robe I wore, then stuck it in my mouth, hoping to stop the bleeding.

"You, young lady in the front seat!" The archbishop's voice echoed from the throne at the altar. I knew he was talking to me because the nun nudged me and told me to stand. I put my bad hand behind my back, stood, and then curtsied. "Yes, your Excellency?" He asked my name and if I was ready to be confirmed. Several priests stood along the altar in a V formation. The archbishop sat very straight among them. I thought he was just trying to keep that silly-looking hat he was wearing from falling off.

After the ceremonies we went back to the cottage. Leona had been confirmed the year before, so she wasn't wearing a long robe. Mother Contrition's aide gave me a holy card with a picture of Jesus with thorns sticking in his head. On the back was written, "Pray to the Holy Mother for guidance." I got another holy card from my housemother with a picture of Mary on the front; on the back it said, "Pray to our Holy Mother and she will always be with you."

Leona gave me a card with a pitiful looking girl on it named Sancta Maria Goretti. The girl had her eyes rolled back into her head and was covered with lilies. On the back was written, "To someone real sweet. I hope you don't get caught again, then you will stay out of penance. Love forever, Leona Chan."

Leona coaxed me to one side of the room and pulled another holy card from her pocket. "Be careful you don't get caught with this," she said. I looked at the card. It had a picture of a little lady holding a very large baby on her lap. Under the picture it said Mother of Good Counsel. On the back, in tiny letters, it said, "My dear Linda, I hope you like your confirmation. I love you very much. Our cottage had a riot and I was sent to isolation 'cause I started it. I want to kiss you. Pray to Mary and she will help you be good. Love, Cobra." I was so excited. I didn't dare show it, because people in the room would get suspicious. I sucked hard on my bad finger. "How did you get this?" I asked Leona. "Remember that tough girl we saw on the steps that day? Well, she gave it to me in the hall at school."

I felt awful, thinking about Cobra up in that little room all alone. I'd heard that they just shoved their food through a little slot at the bottom of the door and that they had to go to the bathroom in a pot. "Boy! I sure hope I never get thrown in that place!"

"Just don't ever talk back to Mother C. and you won't. I remembered seeing, when I first came, a girl being dragged off to isolation by two other girls twice her size because she had screamed and thrown something and called Mother Contrition a bitch. Those two girls dragging her were Mother's pets and got to do everything, even carry keys and unlock doors. Leona and me were afraid of them."

"Whad she say when she gave ya the holy card?"

"She said, 'Here, give this to Linda.' She's going to tell me how to pierce my own ears!"

"How could she tell you that if she didn't see you?"

"Not your senior-my senior. She told me that she smuggled some whiskey in from her outing; and, know what? I could even smell it on her breath!"

"I don't care. What did my senior say to yours when she gave her the holy card for me?"

"Don't know. Maybe, 'Give this to Linda.' And you know what? She lived on Capp Street when she was a little baby right near where I lived and she's 5'6" tall. I'll probably be that tall when I'm full-grown' cause I'm near that tall now."

"Did she get all beat up in the riot?"

"No, she wasn't there."

"Not yours, mine!"

"Oh. Oh, I don't know."

That night Leona crawled into my bed and wouldn't stop talking about her senior. I couldn't hear a word she said because I was thinking about mine. What if I started a riot? I thought. I saw myself punching someone, then screaming like a wild woman; and then Mother's two thugs dragging me kicking and screaming to isolation where I would be thrown into my senior's arms. We would hug each other like Leona and I were doing right then, and no one would mind because we were the worst people possible already and that's why we were in isolation. We could pee in the same pot and eat from the same dish, and no one would tell us not to touch or talk and we'd never be lonely as long as we were in isolation together.

"Leona, lets kiss like the seniors do."

Leona giggled and squirmed under the covers. "Oh, if you really want to."

I pushed my lips against hers and imagined C full-grown breasts pressing against mine. I opened my mouth and stuck my tongue against Leona's teeth. She pushed me away. "Ack! What're ya doing?"

I m sorry.

Leona pulled away and went back to her own bed. I thought that was the way you were supposed to kiss when you felt sexy; now I felt ugly and perverted. I sure didn't want Leona to be mad at me. Maybe my tongue tasted bad: I sucked on it to see if it did. I couldn't tell. I crawled over to her bed and said, crying, "Leona, please don't be mad at me-please."

"Go away, I'm sleeping now."

I tried to touch her; she pulled away. I sniffed, loudly, and swallowed. Someone said, "Shh!" Leona said, "**C,awd!**"

"Please tell me why you're mad."

She leaned over and said in a very angry voice, "You said you wanted to kiss me but then you spit in my mouth!"

I swallowed the spit in my mouth. "I'm sorry. Please let me lay next to you again. I promise I won't spit in your mouth, really. "

ōUm. Well okay, come on, but no more kissing."

I jumped in and nestled against her warm body under the covers. I hugged her as tight as I could. She lay real quiet. I checked to see if she was awake. Yes. Her eyes were looking off into space-a space I wasn't in. My gut ached. Why did she do this-leave me like this. "Leona," I whispered in her ear, trying to make her forget what I had done, "let's look out the window."

"Oo-kay."

We stood on our tip toes on the edge of the mattress and looked out through the small window, past the dark gray-green outline of our buildings, past the cyclone fence to the flickering lights off in the deep blue fog. A siren far away; dogs barking behind the fence; the constant steady sound of the fog horn. Leona put her arms around me and we were together again, wrapped in the lights of the far-away city.

"Hey, you two!"

We both jumped. Leona fell off the bed and knocked over her night stand. Someone pushed us under the bed. Another voice, our housemother's: "What's going on here?" We saw someone roll under the beds, then pop up. "It's just me, Mother, I fell out of bed. " We heard the little window to Mother's cell shut. It was the Indian girl, now rolling towards us. Leona and me hugged her and laughed. "Hey, you girls ever sleep?" she said. It was cold; we all three crawled into Leona's bed.

"It's my birthday tomorrow," the Indian girl said.

"How old are you gonna be," I asked.

"Fourteen and one-quarter."

We smothered giggles until we were purple. Leona was biting the pillow.

"Hey, I gotta picture of Elvis Presley under my pillow, I keep thinking if I sleep on his beautiful face I will dream about bim-but no chance, man, you know who I dream about-you guessed it, ol' Mother Contrition." We smothered more giggles. "Yep, there she comes at me with her rosary beads and I start running down the highway to the reservation where I don't think she's gonna get me but there she comes flying like a bird and catches me and tries to choke me with those rosary beads of hers."

"Wonder what would happen if you put her picture under your pillow?"

"Yeah, then maybe you'll dream of Elvis."

"How about if we put Elvis under Mother's pillow?"

We were rolling in the bed trying not to laugh out loud. Tears were pouring down our cheeks and I held my hand between my legs so I wouldn't pee on Leona's bed. Suddenly, I became aware that my gown was wet. I slid down through the middle of the dorm to the bathroom. When I turned on the light the fan started blowing at the same time and made all kinds of noise. I heard Mother's window open. The front of my gown was bright red. I sat on the toilet trying to decide what to do. I had to get back to my bed at the other end of the dorm and get a kotex from my night stand. I waited and waited for Mother to close her window. Finally, I stuck a bunch of toilet paper up between my legs, and hobbled out of the bathroom. Mother was at her window.

"Linda Doe."

I stood very still with my back to her. A little light shone from her window. "Turn around. I want to ask you a question. " I couldn't turn around-she would know I had been holding myself. She would know I had had my gown pressed against the lips between my legs. I looked down towards Leona's and the Indian girl's beds-they were pretending to be asleep. Mother asked me if anyone was playing in the dorm. I shook my head and said, "No Mother"; and she told me to go back to bed. It took a long time to get to my night stand and find my kotex.

The next morning I was leaning over the sink in the larger bathroom. The sun was in my eyes, and I couldn't seem to move far enough away from it and still reach the sink. I was trying to wash the red spot out of my gown. I ended up leaving the gown there.

Leona grabbed my arm and jumped up and down. "I started my period-I started, I started!" I hugged her and told her she'd have to wash her sheets and clothes like I did all the time. "I don't care."

It wasn't until I was outside the walls of the convent that I realized it was probably my blood, *not* hers she'd found on the sheet-or was it? I wanted to run back inside and find out. Explain to her that if it wasn't her blood, still she'd be sure to get her period soon.

We'd wait until everyone was asleep, then I'd crawl over to Terry's bed. We'd sit on the floor by her bed and talk till the wee hours of the morning. I remembered my friend Leona, from when I was on the junior side, and how she used to climb into bed with me; but Terry would *never* do that.

Terry had a habit of sucking her lower lip and looking down when she was thinking. I never said anything about it to her, even though it looked stupid, but whenever I bit my nails, she'd tell me bow disgusting that was.

"You know, Linda, this girl from the junior side looked at me real funny today."

"Yeah? How come you think she looked funny?"

"Well, not funny ha-ha-funny like this. " She looked at me like she was flirting.

"Oh, that just means she likes you. " I remembered how Leona and I would flirt with the senior girls and was glad it was dark because I was blushing something awful.

"Shit, don't tell me they're a bunch of queers over there. "

I wanted to touch Terry, but I felt like a queer. I wanted to hug her like I used to hug Leona, but she'd think I was a queer. "I don't know if they're queer or not,

I said. "I don't know what a queer is."

"Well, I can tell you right now I'm not one and I don't like those junior girls looking at me funny."

There was always somebody nobody liked, and that somebody was in our dorm. I don't remember her name now but she would bleed something awful when she had her period and we'd all point and make fun of her when she washed her sheet out the next day. She'd also snore so loud the building shook. She was in the bed next to Terry and was now snoring with her head straight back in the pillow.

"Shit! wouldja just look at that stupid bitch there."

She had her mouth wide open and loud gusts of wind were pumping through those crooked teeth of hers. I suddenly didn't know why I hated her unless it was because everyone else did.

"I can smell that broad's breath clear across the room, even when she keeps her mouth shut." Terry held her nose.

"Your breath doesn't smell so hot either, Terry."

"What? Oh come on, really, does my breath really smell?"

"Yep, it not only smells-it downright *stinks*."

She dug through her things to find her toothpaste, then started eating it.

"I don't warma be like that bitch."

"What'd she ever do to you?"

Terry looked at me as if to say, don't you know no one is supposed to like her, and isn't that enough?

"Come on Linda, you know she's a drippy bitch-and you let her know that as much as I do."

It was true. I picked on the poor girl as much as anyone, sometimes more.

"I just decided I wannia be friends with her, Terry."

"What! Well I guess you don't wanna be friends with me then, I cause I sure don't warma hang around with that bitch. "

"Gee, Terry, if anyone was to hear you talk now they'd say you were a queer-I mean, not wanting your girl friend to go around with anyone else and all."

Terry choked on her toothpaste.

"You know what I mean, and I don't mean that. I don't warma be friends with her ... well, maybe we can be nicer to her or something."

I went to the bathroom and smoked a cigarette.

After the tough girls at Holy Terror were all weeded out, I figured I'd take all their places and strut and push people around. I was such hot shit I can hardly believe it myself now. Of course, if you ask any of my old friends from that time, they'd tell you, "Her? Shit, she wasn't so hot-she just thought she was." Or, "She talked big and acted tough, but she was really chickenshit!"

But I don't know anyone from that time any more, so it doesn't matter and I can go ahead and tell you what I thought about me.

We were all standing, reciting prayers in the dining room; after prayers, a quick sign of the cross and a loud banging and shuffling of chairs before sitting down. The nun stood at the front of the dining room, scratching her head with the long pin that held her veil together. The cook stood beside her with her hands flying in every direction, like they always did when she talked. Several girls were serving us in different

parts of the dining room. That job was considered a privilege. I never did it. The usual crap was being served-potatoes, French bread and noodles mixed with a little meat and vegetables.

We hugged our plates and gobbled our food.

"Don't ya want your noodles?"

"No, I'll trade ya for your French bread."

"Where's the milk?"

"It was all sour so we had to toss it out."

"Shit!"

"You know how they get this food?" the server said to me. "That nun that isn't really a nun-the Magdalene-goes out with one of the girls to the farmers'market every week and they beg for the food for us."

A Magdalene was a girl who had been so bad-losing her virginity and all-that she could never become a real nun. She could only spend the rest of her life repenting by working for Mother Contrition.

The server seemed to expect us to show some respect for the fact that someone went out and begged for our food.

"I don't wanna eat no goddam scraps!"

"They're not scraps. The people are very kind to give us free food."

"Oh yeah, yeah; that's why the milk got sour, huh?" I stood up, and the girls from my cottage got very quiet. "Ask Mother why they don't sell that fancy stuff they got in the chapel and use the money to give us some decent food. "

The server was shocked that I would dare say that about the holy artifacts in the holy church.

"Now Linda, they make great sacrifices for us and I'm sure they eat the same food we do. " I grabbed the server's shirt and pulled her up next to me, feeling older and stronger, as well as smarter. "What happens to the money they get from all them organizations?"

"I don't know, I don't run this place. Let go of me-no one is trying to hurt you-, we're all treated the same. Now let go of me. " I let her go and sat back down. Terry, who was always trying to keep me from losing my temper, gave me a candy bar. "Here," she said, 1, my father brought me a bunch of them Sunday."

I pushed it away.

"What're you complaining about, Linda? Looks to me like you eat more than your share. " Some bold person said that. Someone else smothered a laugh. I must have looked like a wildcat ready to kill. "Look girl, don't talk to me like that-hear?" I shouted. I stood up and pushed against her chair, hoping she would fight with me (Gawd knows I needed a good fight about then). The girl hung her head and said she was sorry. I hated her for not fighting with me. And for every other reason I had for hating right then.

It was times like those that I dragged my imaginary boy friend out. His name was Jake and he was just about the greatest hunk around. I rocked back in my chair. "Me and Jake are going down to Mexico this summer. Yeah, when I get outta this hole Jake's gonna buy us each a motorcycle and we're gonna split. 'Course he's gotta finish up his stretch at the pen for armed robbery first, I left his leather jacket at my foster home."

If those girls had known the truth, I would have had to crawl out of there from shame. My last foster mother wouldn't have let a tough guy near me. Even if I swore at Pleasanton, I got in trouble-even though Mollie swore all the time. But my friends didn't know that any more than I knew anything about their lives outside Holy Terror.

"Me and Jake would hang out in Nicotine Alley, next to the school and our friends would come to see us."

My foster mother had told me if she ever caught me in Nicotine Alley she'd drop me on the steps of juvenile hall; so I'd walk way around it to avoid coming anywhere near those tough kids that hung out there.

But these girls didn't know that, and I had their attention.

"We'll probably take the gang to Mexico with us."

I was Jake, tough and free. I took what I wanted and didn't beg, or wait for someone to give it to me. I was louder and taller than most people, so no one pushed me around. Most of all, this Jake, who was me, took care of Linda who needed someone just then to take care of her.

One morning I was told to pack my things and get ready to leave. I did not say goodbye to anyone because I didn't see anyone. Mother didn't tell me where I was going; she just seemed anxious to get me outta there. She locked me in a room with my cardboard box and the crutches, which I no longer needed, but were mine. I'd spent the entire year of 1957 locked in a convent.

About an hour later Mrs. Parrot arrived. My two little brothers were waiting in the car. I hadn't seen them for close to two years. We felt very awkward with each other. We were taken straight to Sonoma to a foster home, and had no idea where we were going or why.

The foster mother in Sonoma was confused and upset when we arrived bag and baggage, 'cause she thought the Probation Officer was going to bring just Tommy by and just to see if he fit in with the decor of the house. The foster mother wasn't looking for his sister and brother too. Mrs. Parrot scurried off, leaving us with this confused woman who kept saying she didn't understand.

Mrs. Parrot was an unusually tall woman with short blond hair. She wore beautiful clothes and stood like a model. She spoke in a whiny voice and had a cunning, deceitful manner. She was always after someone else's job and bragged of "her children" all being placed right away. She was forever divorcing her husband and trotting off to Mexico or Europe.

My little brother was three by this time. The people in this home had an adopted son who we beat up on when no one was looking. Their kid was five and was their kid—we were on our own.

The foster mother, as much as I can remember, stood all the time at the kitchen sink staring out of the window and complaining about the neighbors. She was in her fifties with short graying hair and wore floppy cloth slippers everywhere. I'd come outta the convent a whole lot tougher than when I went in and didn't make many friends 'cause girls in suburbia didn't act tough.

I had a friend from the convent who told me she was on probation and couldn't see me 'cause I was against her probation. We weren't suppose to associate with people like us 'cause god knows we'll never change and may even become a bunch of communists.

I saw Lester and Helda when they came to see us in Sonoma. I didn't want to see either of them. I was influenced by people who were hired to find a "good home" for me to live in. There was something wrong with me because I didn't come from a good home and no other home was mine.

I was afraid of Lester the first time I saw him again. I stood on the other side of the room—alone while Helda and my brothers all huddled in a corner with Lester, who was remote. I was so afraid he'd touch me. I was afraid I'd freeze and be frozen in that miserable, awkward position for the rest of my life because I didn't know bow to say no. I don't remember how long the visit was but I thought it was hours and hours before they left.

School in Sonoma was a disaster. I had to deal with boys and compete; and it was a large school. I did not understand any of it. Most of the time I wanted to hide. It was a newly-built school, sterile and impersonal. The students were treated professionally. I was placed in all the remedial programs, so I was doing the third grade in the eighth. I'd sit and daydream and doodle, closing out the classroom from my thoughts. Once I was called out of a class and sent to the office. They told me to use deodorant and comb my hair and mend my clothes and didn't anyone ever tell me that before. They looked at me as though through a special glass

lens: I was the awful distortion of themselves-white, attractive; but poor and dirty-a part of the earth erupting in human form.

I often suffered from severe menstrual cramps and begged to go home but was sent back to class and told by the school nurse that it was my imagination.

I had my own room in this home and I'd lie awake at night and listen to the radio-the light from the dial would cast shadows on the wall. The tunes were the ones the girls in the convent talked about liking "on the outs.

I'd listen and think and remember:

Yolanda ... oh yeah, yeah too badfor Yolanda ... ran away an an was in a car with some guys runnin from the cops ... car crashed . . . Yolanda broke her back ... ummmmmmmmm ... dadadadadumde ... Leona ... Mother Contrition threw her out cause all the senior girls fell in love with her cause she looked like a boy ... dumdedummmmmmmmm Franie ... Mother was so pissed cause her uncle gave her a good home back east an she yeah went an ran Off for no good reason or that's what mother said ... onanonanonanon

An ex-GI with tattoos up and down his hairy body started a teen drop-in in an old building in town. I began banging out there and so did service men on leave and motorcycle gangs. And the GI with the tattoos would say, "Hey watsa matta kid ya look lost" in his daddy voice.

I soon got the reputation for hanging out with older boys, so automatically became a menace to society. It was assumed these boys would eventually rape me and I'd have to tell on them and those poor boys would have to go to trial before they were released to continue policing the streets by raping women and keeping the order they are taught to keep. Or I'd get pregnant and have another me.

One day Mrs. Parrot came and took my brother Tommy and me back to Urchin Hall. My little brother was taken to another foster home.

My unit, Urchin Hall, was for protective custody. But the "girls unit" was where they kept girls who were considered delinquent because they had run away and had babies at eleven and cut school. Awful stuff like that. One of the girls from the girls' unit had an infant in the nursery in Urchin Hall and would come every day to feed it. One day she ran out of the nursery screaming because her baby was gone and no one knew where it was. It had been taken to a foster home or adopted out.

I went to Urchin Hall many times between the time I was two years old and nineteen. The church and the state were often stabilizing factors in my life with their rituals and routines. I always knew what to expect from both of them, even though I was a file number to one and a lost soul to the other.

I latched on to one of the counselors, who would give me little gifts if I promised not to tell anyone, and who would hug me a lot and say if it weren't for her drunken old man she'd take me home with her.

When Helda first brought me to Urchin Hall, I was given test after test in gray and white rooms to establish who I was in relation to what the rest of the world was. I was labeled incorrigible and sent to a lot of psychiatrists. The psychiatrists asked me the most incredible questions.

"What did you have for lunch?"

"Don't 'member."

"Why did you throw spinach at the new girl?"

"Urn-m-m-M."

"You're rocking and not answering my question."

"Um-m-m-m. "

"I have another appointment so I'll have someone return you to Urchin Hall."

I saw several shrinks-or they saw me. We certainly never met with one another. They tested me and tested me and sent me to court hearings. The doctors were obviously looking for something, and not finding it-else, **why did they keep** on looking?

While waiting to see one shrink I met a boy who offered to help me break out if I'd just fuck him but I didn't want to get caught under some dude with my pants down, and where would I go anyway?

I was in the kitchen peeling potatoes with this black girl who decided I was prejudiced and we began punching each other until someone pulled us apart.

Urchin Hall was always crowded so the girls over twelve went up to the girls'unit to sleep. The girls'unit was a couple of long hallways with little rooms that locked automatically and didn't have door knobs. Everything was painted green. There was a cell with nothing in it except straps that were chained to the

floor where girls who were really uncontrollable (whatever that meant) were strapped spread-eagled to the cement floor. The counselors complained about having to get the men from the boys' unit to help strap a girl down and how the men would take their time getting there.

I was in a cell one night that they'd just finished painting, and I was writing graffiti on the walls. Suddenly a woman unlocked the door and began yelling at me and telling me I couldn't stay there if I was going to write on the walls-but then she stopped herself: she remembered that there was no place else to go, and she locked me back in. We were always referred to as "those brats from protective custody." The cells were about seven by seven, and they would sometimes put five of us together if their unit was crowded. The cell had one cast-iron bed with one pillow and a blanket, and we'd fight over them if there were more than two of us. Once I was put *alone* in a cell with two beds-and that I never understood. If, however, we were paired off, we'd perform sexual rites after lights out; and I don't think we ever really thought too much about that one way or another. One time I was with a girl my age whose mother had knocked most of her teeth out. I told her not to feel bad because last time I was there I had had two black eyes-but, anyway, there we were in this cell together and I had a hot dog I'd sneaked from our dinner. I told this girl how the girls up in girls' unit used them and how they said they were fun. Well, we tried to stick that thing in one of us and then the other, but it was so uncomfortable we used our tongues instead which turned out to be more exciting. I could never understand why those girls used hot dogs.

The lights in the cells were turned off or on from the outside, and in each cell there was a small window with bars on it near the ceiling. On one side of the building, the windows overlooked the walled-in cement recreation area. We were caged like animals in a zoo. Most of the cells didn't have a toilet, and we were not allowed to come out of our cells after the lights were off. If we banged on the door to tell them we had to go to the bathroom, they'd tell us to shut-up and wait until morning; so we'd piss on the floor and in the morning there would be a long stream of piss coming from our cells.

Once I was locked in a cell with a regular, an unwired nine year old. There was a toilet in that particular cell and she kept sticking her head in the bowl and lapping up the water. She raced around the room like a monkey, swinging from the window and jabbering in senseless phrases. Despite her young age, she already had breasts and pubic hair. She laughed uncontrollably; she tore her clothes off and started masturbating madly. A voice from another cell shouted at me, "Hey, don't you go and do nothing to hurt her, hear, girl!"

"it's okay, I'm just trying to get her dressed."

"Don't go laughing at her either, 'cause she's crazy, you know."

Boy, I'll say. Whatever happened to her, how'd she get like that? No one ever told you those things. After I pulled her off the window and got some clothes on her so she wouldn't get cold, she sat curled up in a corner and stared silently at me with her piercing violet eyes. I took my pencil and started to write something on the wall but the girl jumped up and grabbed the pencil out of my hand and started to put it up inside her vagina. I wrestled with her around the floor trying to get it away from her, and the voice in the other cell became hysterical because of the wild noises. I had trouble sleeping that night. This kid was either throwing toilet water on me or sticking her hand between my legs.

But other things happened that were just as bad at Urchin Hall. There was this little deaf girl I taught how to read and write; another girl my age had a brain tumor and died in her sleep. Then there was this fat kid who was a fire freak. I told her which counselors smoked and carried matches in their pockets because I liked to watch her expression change from wild and uncontrolled to mean and attentive. Once, another girl and I walked in the nursery and caught the fat kid swinging a baby around by its ankles. We went over to her, slowly, and told her to put the baby on the bed; but she just laughed and laughed while the poor baby stiffened its little body and gasped for breath. We got the baby away okay and the fat kid lived in a cell in the girls' unit for two years after. It wasn't really her fault-there was a staff shortage and the counselors had asked her to help out with the babies.

When Nona got pissed at Maria and slammed the door on her thumb, I asked to talk to the man they sent for from the probation department. I told him those doors were too heavy and that it was just lucky more kids didn't get their fingers cut off. Maria's thumb was cut off. Nona got sent to Holy Terror, which was the bottom line. Her mother and brothers and sisters all hitched from somewhere in the South because they

wanted to come to California. Then her mother married some prick who raped Nona. That's why they locked Nona up.

The kids and stories go on forever and ever. They're all still there-they never grew up. I know, because I see them everytime I close my eyes.

Everywhere I've ever been for as far back as I can remember there was always a Mrs. White who was black. The Mrs. White at Urchin Hall was also enormous and had deep set dimples in her round cheeks and large, warm black eyes. I was sitting in the dining room, in silence-which was strictly enforced during meals. Across from me was a new girl who was crying. I took a gob of spinach on my fork and used my fork like a slingshot to let the spinach fly. That poor girl got it all in the face. Suddenly I felt myself being lifted by my shirt and I was being rushed down the hall to Mrs. White's office. "Now what did she do?" Mrs. White demanded angrily. After the counselor told her, she closed the door and aimed her big behind at the chair. I sat sprawled on a chair across from her and looked as mean as I could manage.

"I've known you since you were a baby. Did you know that?"

"Um, so what?"

"You were a little dickens then, too." I tried to look even meaner. "I don't know how much longer I can keep you out of trouble, girl. You're going to end up a permanent resident at the girls' unit yet. Those girls never make it anywhere once they've been there for any length of time, One girl I know's boy friend dropped her when he found out she'd been up there."

Mrs. White was a well-meaning person.

I went to a foster home in San Leandro that lasted a month or so. The people were very sterile, very boring, and kept the house like it was going to be photographed for some fancy magazine. The woman never smiled and neither did the husband. We'd have dinner at five o'clock sharp after the husband got home from work. He'd spit a few curt, nasty phrases at the woman and her seven-year-old daughter in his harsh voice; but he'd hold the five-year-old son on his lap and tease and play with him. He never said more than two words to me and I was glad of it. After dinner we'd all sit in the living room, with only one lamp on to save electricity; three females just sitting there with our legs together, our hands folded on our laps, to watch the husband play with his son. Who I secretly hoped was someone else's. The woman kept telling me how she'd asked for a teenaged boy and how they were so much less trouble and didn't have to be watched so closely. I'm sure I was taking up space-I always seem to be taking up space-even in large places.

Mrs. Parrot, as usual, came to pick me up the day after I was caught sitting on the top bunk, where I slept, smoking a cigarette and drinking a glass of wine.

The homes I went to always complained about my walking around and not telling them where I was walking to. It was considered a real problem. After all, I wasn't a boy and almost anything could happen to me and they'd be blamed. I was tested again and scolded for not being able to get along. I'd better shape up, or else. Then I went to court where the judge confirmed that I existed; and I was sent to another home.

Ted and Stella lived on a few acres of land outside of Pleasanton. Anne's family lived up the street but Anne hated her mother and stepfather and came to live with Ted and Stella. Preston, Stella's brother, lived in Oakland but came to visit often enough to count as living there, too. Mollie lived in a trailer behind the house. She was a tough, tiny woman who swore a lot. She kept her gray hair cut short and slicked straight back on her head, and smoked unfiltered cigarettes and never wore a dress. People who came to the house thought she was a man; and I'd sometimes find this embarrassing: "Who is she if she isn't your father?" "I don't know, except she sleeps in a trailer behind the house."

Mollie spent most of her time sitting in a chair everyone said was hers because she liked it. Mollie'd say to Stella, "When I die, for chrissakes, don't go burying me in no goddamn dress." She wanted to be buried in a shirt and slacks like she always wore; and when she did die Stella, and Mollie's daughter (who had never bothered with her before) fought at the funeral parlor about it. Stella figured if that's what Mollie had said that's what she meant. Mollie lived a hard and vigorous life and summed it up by watching re-runs on t.v. because that's what she wanted to do. I asked her what she'd do if she had to go somewhere where you had

to wear a dress, and she said she just wouldn't go. Her pet monkey and calico cat died shortly after she did. Mollie was close to seventy when she died. I heard she had been an alcoholic, but she couldn't stand even the smell of the stuff when I met her.

She lived a full, hard life and told it like she saw it in four-letter words.

Stella met Mollie when they had jobs as cooks over at some work camp together. Stella was Mollie's supervisor and as tough as Mollie. She packed a gun and had been on her own since she was twelve. She dropped out of school in the third grade so she could go to work. School didn't pay money, but factories did. If she wanted something and there was a brick wall in the way of getting it, you'd better goddamn well believe she'd knock it down with her bare fist. She wasn't cruel—she was tough outside and kind and understanding inside. She was the type of person who had to control every situation she was in or it wasn't worth being in.

Stella always lived with women who felt the same as she did about most things. She got Mollie out of her apartment half-starved and drowned in booze and made her come live with her and Ted. Mollie agreed on the condition that she could live in the trailer out back.

Stella, Ted and Mollie were active in starting the unions way back when; and Ted would always refuse promotions in the company where he worked because he wanted to stay a worker. They were all Democrats when no one else was admitting to being anything but a Republican—which had something to do with Eisenhower.

While Mollie loved cats, Stella loved dogs. She always had three or four dogs around that she'd picked up off the road somewhere. I used to feel like a new pup. I was expected to do as much as any fourteen-year-old boy around the farm—slop the sow, feed the sheep, feed and milk the goats, and look for duck and chicken eggs. I fondled Black Beauty, the rabbit, and caught and cleaned my own fish. The food always tasted better there, somehow. Maybe it was because I saw it growing; and when it was in my mouth I felt like I belonged to the earth and she to me. Stella always said, "That work won't hurt her none, she's a strong kid." Everyone worked—not just me. For the first time that I could remember, I was getting a lot of affection from the adults around me.

Stella was twelve years younger than Preston but he would jump when Stella spoke. His wife had died just before I came and he was still hurt over it. Stella had felt close to his wife, too, but she had a different attitude about death: when she'd see Preston moping in the corner she'd tell him it wasn't going to do him no good and his wife wouldn't have wanted it that way, so let the dead rest in peace. Stella's attitude was that people never died—they just moved on.

All sorts of people came to stay at that house. They'd come and go, sometimes staying for days at a time. There was a drunk who had a purple heart award and was really Preston's friend, but he would come down to Stella to sober up. The lady that lived on the only hill in Pleasanton used to drop her teeth in a glass of water the minute she walked in the door. Her old man had been an opera singer in the old days. The waitress that used to sleep with all the men in town would come to complain about her boss, who took her tips away from her all the time. There were two gay school teachers who came out to visit from Chicago every year because they had known Stella and Ted before.

And then there was Helda, poor Helda. Helda came alone this time because Stella said she didn't want to see that sonofabitchin husband of Helda's. She came every month on the day she was told to come and stayed the hour she was told to stay and then left. We never knew what to say to one another. She talked with Stella and Mollie sometimes, but I don't know what about. I remember how she looked then, her stout body in cotton print dresses and white oxfords. On hot days beads of perspiration would roll off her forehead; and her own smell would mix with the cologne she was wearing and leave a rancid odor behind her. It was as if she came to visit every month only to remind me of who I really was. She did not want to hear about what a good time I was having. Instead, she told me about how wonderful Lester had been to her—buying her things like a new apron for her birthday, for instance. Mollie and Stella felt sorry for Helda and never said anything bad about her. I started feeling sorry for her, too.

Ted was an eccentric repairman who floated through life absorbing knowledge and sorting it out for his own benefit rather than for some institution. I really thought he was great for that. He was several years younger than Mollie, Preston and Stella. But then it seemed to me they were all pretty old, even Anne, who was eighteen. Ted wore baggy old sailor pants and suspenders and a brown shirt and an old heavy coat. He drove a pick-up truck that rattled and creaked every inch of the way. I was Ted's shadow. As soon as Ted came home from work I'd follow him around and ask questions about everything. I learned more from Ted and the others than I ever did in school. Ted taught me about animals, astronomy and how things were so much freer before all those people started moving in after the war. He and Stella liked the open plains and bare hills and the way no one bothered you because they were all running from something anyway. Anne and Ted would take the doves from their pen and yank the heads from their necks and clean them for dinner. I asked Ted not to kill a crippled dove, so he built a special pen for it and I took care of it.

I never killed the doves. I fed them and talked to them twice a day and couldn't stomach ripping them apart like that. But I ate them, and didn't think anything of it. Sheep are the easiest animals in the world to lead: I'd borrow the quarter horse from the old Polish lady whose field used to burn a lot and lead those sheep like I was leading cattle across the open range in the midnineteenth century.

Every now and again wolves would come out of the hills at night and kill some sheep. Stella and Ted would perch on a fence and wait for them the next night, and shoot them with a .22 rifle; then they'd stay away for some time.

I watched a ewe give birth to two rams. She refused the second one. I didn't see anything beautiful about birth. That little beast had pushed its way through just to lie there and die because the mother didn't want it. The ewe ate the afterbirth; then she took her chosen baby away. Tilda and I cleaned the little rejected fellow up, then lassoed the mother and tied her to a fence to force her to let him nurse.

I went out several times a day to make the mother feed the lamb. She fought like hell and bleated loudly, but if the lamb was going to live she had to cooperate by letting him nurse. The little lamb did live and got very fat. Ted cut off his balls for some reason, but left his tail long, I named him Tag-a-long, because he followed me everywhere. I fed him with a bottle even after he was much too old for it. He would even follow me into the house; and Mollie'd scream "Get that goddamn sonabitchin beast out of here!" I already had Mollie's monkey, a lizard, a canary and a hamster in my room.

We always had enough milk and eggs. An old couple brought Ted and Stella cheese and butter from the mountains. I heard they'd have to use a mule to get from the road to their house on the cliff.

Ted and Stella were into fishing and boats. We went down to the San Joaquin delta every weekend, come rain or shine, and fish. They owned some land on the levy of the *river*. *We* built a dock there and bought a thirty-foot cruiser, an old job from the twenties. I sat on the bow and spent hours shining the brass bell. We also built an outhouse on the levy. Preston would sometimes come with us, while Mollie and Anne stayed home to look after things.

Stella was intrigued by the whole foster child thing. The health department came to inspect her house before I could come. There were hundreds of things they had to do to measure up. The health department was separate from all other state agencies concerned with me. What was required of Ted and Stella had nothing to do with me personally.

Anne worked the whole time she lived there and paid her own way. At first, she was excited to have me there and treated me like her little sister. She had a room across from me but always kept it locked. Stella said she was boy-crazy, but Stella usually said that about any of the girls she knew. She felt a girl's time should be spent more constructively. There was a real conflict between school and home on this point. At school I was taught to pretend to like boys and prepare myself for marriage. I didn't like boys; but I liked what they were allowed to do. I didn't want to be a boy, but I wanted to be able to do what they did. I made friends with Jack and David, in spite of my feelings about boys. David raised pigeons and raced snails by sprinkling salt behind them. He and Jack were the only friends I had from school. Jack giggled a lot, especially when we'd steal dirty magazines from the drug store at lunch time. He had a terrible crush on David and used to ask me about him because he thought I knew more than he did; but I didn't. David never so much as held my hand the whole time I knew him and we all preferred it that way, especially Jack.

I could do anything David could, and sometimes better.

We would ride our bikes off a small embankment to a construction site below. It was a great feeling floating in the air down to the ground. Once David fell off his bike and said his leg hurt. So I jumped on my bike and headed for his grandmother's house to tell her. When I got there, David was standing in front of the house laughing madly. I punched him in the gut and went home.

Stella knew what our relationship was and welcomed it. The girls at school, however, kept asking if I was still going with David; I'd try and explain that he was just a friend. just meaning we didn't fuck or make-out. I wasn't able to communicate with the other girls because of the time they spent living and breathing for boys. Anne had a boy friend who did nothing but fuck her and didn't take her anywhere except his apartment. Although Stella was always on Anne's back about it, Anne was popular at school and had loads to talk about.

One afternoon I wanted to go into town and Stella sent Anne with me. Anne made a big deal out of taking care of me. She wouldn't let me do anything. "Let's walk through the graveyard, Anne." "No Linda, let's go home." "You want to look around Sam's market?" "No, hurry up, I have a phone call to make." She wanted to call her boy friend. "You go on home, Anne, I'm gonna sit under this tree for a while, and I don't need a goddamn babysitter anyway. " I sat down while Anne pleaded for me to get up and go with her because otherwise she'd get in trouble. Finally, she went home. When I got back, it was dark. Ted and Stella had gone to some dance, and Mollie was sitting in her chair watching t. v. and smoking. "Hey, twirp, whadda ya say?" "Hey, Mollie."

I went to my room and closed the door. Anne threw the door open. Her eyes blazed like a mad woman's; she sputtered when she spoke; tears were streaming down her cheeks. "You little bastard! I've tried to be nice to you, cause of Ted and Stella but you're nothing but a smartass little bitch!" She screamed, "I hate you!" She pulled me off the bed and wrestled me to the floor. She was quite a bit bigger than I was and had an advantage. I scratched her face, then she sat on my ribs and kept slapping my face over and over again. I couldn't breathe; I begged her to get off of me, promising that I'd never ever do it again. She finally got off and locked herself back in her room. Mollie'd turned up the t. v. so she could hear it over the battle. I hated losing to Anne. I went to the kitchen to get some water. Mollie asked if it was over, and when I said yes, she turned the t.v. back down. Ted and Stella came home, wanted to know what had happened, then went to bed. It was over as far as everyone but me was concerned. I was still pissed. I waited till everyone was sleeping and put my clothes on over my p.j.'s. When I started to slip out the window, the dogs Stella slept with began barking; so I stood silently next to my window until she quieted them, "There's nothing out there, now hush!" Then I walked toward town. I was going to call Helda. I imagined the two of us running off together. She would never have left Lester, but I didn't believe that then. I was almost to the city limits when two cops pulled up behind me and asked me where I was going. "Home," I said. Then they insisted I get in the car so they could drive me there. I gave them some phony address and was surprised to see it was a trailer court. I got out and they got out, like they were going to walk me to the door. I started to run and they both grabbed me. I struggled for a second, then said, "All right, take me to juvenile hall." I felt like I was confessing, with nothing to confess. They were a little confused; then one said, "Guess we'll have to take her over to Santa Rita."

Cops were blue men who stole children in the dead of night.

They did their bit of phoning in, and all that, from the car on the way over, and kept asking me questions: "What's your name?" "How old are you?" I sat silent and fantasized about how they would put me in jail with the big timers and maybe I could learn how to survive on my own. After some time, they'd just let me go for lack of evidence or something.

Once we were inside Santa Rita they took me into an office while they tried to determine my age. My age seemed terribly important. I opened my mouth so they could look at my teeth. A cop brought me a coke and smiled, a little nervously. "You gonna tell us your name?" he asked. I stared at him without speaking, and drank the coke. It was two a.m. The cop started thumbing through -the phone book.

"Yer name O'Brien?"

"Yeah, my name's O'Brien."

"What's yer father's name?" Cops were so stupid. "Ah, it's Peter." The cop called Peter O'Brien in the middle of the night to say his daughter was down at Santa Rita. Poor old Peter was eighty years old and never had a daughter anyway. The cop didn't give up. He called at least six more O'Briens before this woman cop came in and stopped him.

"You fellas are too sweet with her. " My eyes got bigger and I swallowed hard. "Okay, toots, you'd better tell me your name or I'm putting you in there!" She pointed to a room behind her. "And those babes are tough, they'll take care of you."

"My name is Linda Doe and I live at 2123 Sierra Vista, "

"What's your father's name?" I couldn't believe it; and she had seemed so smart. So I said George Doe; and do you know they called George Doe at three a.m. and he didn't have a daughter either. They glared at me. "I live in a foster home with Ted and Stella Joneman." "Jesus! I know them," the cop that brought me in said. "They're great folks!"

So they took me to juvenile hall because I was in a foster home with great folks and it was 3 a.m.

After I was locked in a cell, a voice in the darkness said, "Hey, girl, what's you up for?" "Speak lower," I said professionally, "they can hear us, and the rooms are bugged, ya know. " Then I told that girl the wildest story you ever heard. The real one seemed too ridiculous. She told me she had killed her mother with a hammer. Maybe she did and maybe she didn't; I didn't care. It was nice talking to someone in the dark.

Anne and Stella stormed juvenile hall the next day and a social worker sat and listened to us argue. I felt a little better but was never able to communicate with Anne. She moved to an apartment after I went back. She had worked since she was fourteen and always paid her own way.

I ran out of the house everytime I got angry. Stella always thought I was running away again and would call the cops. Then Mrs. Parrot would come and tell me how I was getting too old for that sort of thing, and if I *didn't* watch out I'd be sent to reform school or a mental institution-whichever had room at the time. After Anne left, Stella began to complain about how little the county paid for my care and how I'd better start thinking about what I was going to do with my life. I was nearly seventeen, and it was time to grow up before I'd hardly been a kid. Stella and I argued more and more about little things. I really cared about her and I didn't want to grow up and leave her.

Stella went out fishing alone and left me with a gun in the little houseboat, because some prisoner had just escaped and she didn't want me to get hurt. I sat there alone in the houseboat trying to imagine some guy who looked like a mad man, foaming at the mouth and ready to tear anyone in sight apart limb from limb just for meanness' sake.

Mrs. Parrot came once a month to visit this home. I was always embarrassed when she'd pull that goddamn county car right up in front of the house; when she came and parked in front of the school, I'd sit in the girls'bathroom until everyone at school left. Those kids all had homes where everyone was related; and when they got a hangnail their concerned parents rushed them to the doctor. I thought I was weird: I was one of those kids everyone always talks about and pities but never likes.

One day I came to terms with the fact that I was no longer fourteen and I'd have to find work after I graduated from high school-or a husband. I knew I would no longer be welcome anywhere unless I worked and brought in my own income. Stella and I were beginning to fight constantly. Mollie just stayed out of the way. School was more and more unbearable. I was still in remedial classes and spent most of the time in class in a complete fog. My social life was even worse. Someone would say, "I saw you and David at the movies the other night and ya didn't make out. You two having a fight?" Or, "How come you get a ride to and from school? If you didn't, you could come to my house and meet my brother. " Every girl I knew was going to marry her boyfriend after graduation and live happily ever after in Pleasanton as a suburban housewife. I wanted to be a child forever, riding horses, milking goats and fighting with Mollie about the

weather and all. I became more and more overwhelmed with the idea of having to deal with the adult world. I was tired of pretending I was normal just to survive.

God and the state sent me everywhere.

When I was seventeen, I asked to leave the foster home in Pleasanton because I didn't feel I could grow anymore there. I only had one close friend, David, and I couldn't imagine how he could possibly be of any more use once we both were out of high school.

I told my probation officer, Mrs. Parrot, that I wanted to go to an all girls' school. But I'd already been through the Convent of the Holy Terror once, and after Holy Terror no other institution would take me; after Holy Terror it was down hill all the way. My only other choice, Mrs. Parrot told me, was to go to a sort of junior prison or a mental institution.

You get sent to prison because you're responsible. You get sent to a mental institution when you're a victim. There seems to be more dignity in going to prison. For children, there's more self-respect got from begging on the streets than going in a court room. A judge in a black robe sits on a stand. There's a fence in front of him to separate him from the audience. I sit with Helda, who continually pulls on her nylons. The judge asks me if I want a lawyer. Why should I take one of his lawyers? When the judge asks me if I want to go back to the Convent of the Holy Terror, I say, yes.

Mrs. Parrot whipped me off, in a county car. It's big and brick and hidden behind high hedges on a San Francisco hill. Holy Terror was pretty much the same as when I'd left it a few years before, when I was thirteen.

I always remember smells. Nuns themselves have a clean fresh smell but their bathrooms all smell like garbage. Nuns have a lot of empty space. They don't have dust or cobwebs on anything. Nuns take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, plus another, unspoken, one which says cleanliness is next to godliness and all clocks should be five minutes fast.

Convents are sometimes like protective wombs. The entire place was fenced in. Ivy covered the cyclone fence; and the fence was hidden by a hedge. The only man was the gardener-carpenter-plumber combination, and he was very old and never lifted his eyes. The other men we saw wore robes and babbled in Utin on an altar at morning mass. I was relieved to be with women but I felt guilty about it. The people in control of my life were convinced I was almost normal now, and I didn't want to screw it up. That could be dangerous. I spent a great deal of time pretending I was normal, nourishing their fantasies. On my first trip to Holy Terror, I was only a junior delinquent. Now, older, I could become a full-fledged criminal. And now that I was on the senior side Mother Contrition couldn't bother me anymore. I could sometimes hear her loud voice raging through the corridors and I'd wonder if some poor girl had stolen a thumb tack. But I was only twelve and thirteen then; now I was older and stronger. The senior side had more and older, stronger girls. We lived in cottages, and the nuns and aides were more lenient. All my belongings were searched and only part of them returned. I was examined by a doctor. They'd already given me an examination just the day before as I left juvenile hall to see if I was pregnant or had vd. They did it again. Our mail was censored and we were only allowed to write to four people a week. These had to be people mutually approved of by the court and convent. The housemother read our mail. I know for a fact I didn't get some of mine. I know that's a federal offence. We were not allowed to watch the news on t.v. or allowed to read anything that wasn't strictly Catholic. We were herded from room to room and locked in everywhere. Keys, hallways, doors, high ceilings, wires on the windows-I felt as closed in as the others did. We formed gangs.

Since Holy Terror was at the top of the Bad List (the bottom was the federal pen) the girls were also tough. The place was run by a group of young lesbians who were called that because of their extreme familiarity with one another. My first day back, I was assigned to Terry, who had a severe case of acne. One of the nuns said she was my "big sister." I told the nun I didn't want a sister. She insisted a sister was one of the rules. Terry and I hated each other at first but we were both afraid of the lesbians. Terry had come the month before me and had a few friends; they were all afraid of the lesbians. We clung to each other and stayed close to the walls.

There was the chick who played the girl and the vault who played the boy, and they were forever switching roles. A little kid everyone called Tinker led the queers. Tinker was about sixteen and wore her dark hair slicked back on the sides; a forelock fell between her eyes. We **all had** to wear skirts and blouses but Tinker was the only one who wore the waist of her skirt around her hips. Terry and I got our own gang after we became friends. Our gangs would sit across the room from one another and glare. Once a week we'd eat our dinner in the cottages, where we slept. At dinner, too, we glared. One night the housemother decided wouldn't it be nice if we ate by candlelight and listened to soft music.

"Now," she said, "wouldn't it be nice if your boy friends were here?"

The little queers giggled and said, "Who needs boy friends?" The housemother frowned and turned the lights back on. I felt sorry for her; she tried so hard and believed so strongly. Nuns neither ate nor used the bathroom with us. But they watched us eat.

Each week we were each given one hundred points. As the week wore on, our points often wore off. They were subtracted for offences we committed against the convent, like swearing and touching. We were supposed to be saving up our points for outings with our families, if we had any; and whether we liked it or not. One of the things we really got marked off for was fighting.

Left alone and unsupervised, we behaved like unleashed animals. The housemother went out and locked us in. Immediately, Tinker and her gang came meandering over to our gang and started harassing me.

"You don't like us, do ya?" I straightened up and said, "No!" Then we began calling each other names and our gangs started pushing us at each other and shouting, "Go get her!" Someone posted herself at the door to warn us when the housemother was returning, but I said, "I don't want a fight." And Terry said, "You're chickenshit"; and her gang said, "Yeah," and mine looked disappointed and Terry slapped me and I punched her in the stomach and our gangs whistled and shouted, and we punched each other out. Then someone shouted, "Mother's commin!" and we all dissolved into quiet teenagers sitting and watching t.v. Convents teach you how to become invisible.

When the young lesbians gained enough strength to enforce their own order in our own society they were thrown out and scattered to the winds. They were sent to other institutions, homes, or back to the families that never wanted them anyway. They were strong and independent. Somehow the state had to stop that-get them married or lock them away for good. They couldn't be left alone to live as angry amazons. Tinker and I became friends before she left. We'd sit with our arms around one another, and she'd tell me how she was going to be a doctor and no motherfucker was gonna stop her. I hope to hell no one ever did.

The convent staff got very paranoid after the lesbians were thrown out. Terry and I were watched suspiciously for some time. We'd become very close friends, and slept a bed apart. To fool the housemother, we would talk about boys, like we were supposed to, and how we'd get married someday and live next door to each other, and live happily ever after. But then Terry started going to a male therapist and we began drifting apart. She'd come back from seeing him and sulk in a corner for hours and never speak to me. Our simple talk became strained. One night:

"Sst! Hey Terry! Ya still awake?"

"shit! I am now."

"Ya know what I did?"

"Oh no! What?"

I painted a mustache on the statue of Mary."

"Oh! Ob fuck! You know they always blame me for things you do. Now we'll both be in trouble. Did anyone see you?"

"Jest Aggie."

"The ol' lady?"

"Yeah, but she won't tell 'cause I told her I'd throw her down the stairs if she did."

"Yeah, shit! You would, too!"

"Everyone's asleep. I think I'll go to the john and smoke a cigarette."

"What? Where'd you get that?"

"The stupid ass priest dropped it."

"You don't care if you ever get outta this place, do you, Linda? Well, I wanna go home this weekend so don't mess me up.

"Ya gonna see yer ol' man?"

"I'm gonna see my *father*."

"He's a nice guy, uh?"

"Yeah, of course he's nice. Don't you love your father?" "Goodnight, Terry."

Every two weeks parents were allowed to visit in the main parlor. Helda came only once a month, but came faithfully. When Helda didn't show, I'd go and visit with someone else's family, like Chrissy's because her mom always brought cookies. Chrissy's father was blind and used to be a newspaper editor. I'd eat their cookies and tell them about all the rotten things I'd done the week before, like tying my housemother to her chair, or scratching SHrr on the pews in the chapel; and Chrissy's mom would gasp and her father would roar with laughter.

My housemother was also my English and psychology teacher, as well as the librarian and organist, rose gardener, and broken-window fixer. The academic level of the school was thought to be very low. I had three teachers who would give us assignments from out-dated books, then would sit back and read a novel or something. They were lay teachers-the nuns were fewer and more dedicated. My housemother wanted to upgrade the academic level, plus make other changes, which I'm not sure of now. She was met with a lot of resistance. Her psychology course was geared to teaching us how to live in a family. She was a firm believer in Freud and in all of us as potential mothers of male children. We were told to find a good man and if he didn't turn out to be so good we could pray a lot and it was our own damn fault anyway.

Mother came to each bed at night and splashed holy water on us to bless us before we slept. She didn't kiss us goodnight because it was a sacrilege to touch nuns. One night:

"Mother, ya gotta hole in yer shoe."

"Yes, I know. I was supposed to get another pair but one of the older mothers went to the hospital so I guess I'll have to wait for a while."

"How come?"

"Our money's pooled in the convent and we only get what we need."

"You need another pair of shoes."

"Yes, but'the older mother needed to have an operation more.

"Ya can borrow a pair of mine if things get too bad, Mother.

"Goodnight, Linda.

Once I was called into the office of the directress and accused of being an instigator and a leader. Everyone began whispering about how that queer stuff might start up again. The directress doodled coolly on a pad of paper and wanted to know what I planned to do after I graduated; and I told her I guess I'll get a job, and she asked, "Until you marry?" I told her I guessed so. Girls from the Convent of the Holy Terror couldn't become nuns and were banned from all other convents. Holy Terror's big success story was about some woman who got the Best Mother of the Year Award.

Above the directress's office on the third floor of the main building lived three very old women who were referred to as the old girls. They'd been sent there by the state, years before, like we had. One of them looked like one of Al Capp's characters in Lil' Abner. She had a hammer face with moles that grew long

strips of hair. She wore a bun at the nape of her neck and smoked a pipe, and limped in her army boots. They all worked in the kitchen and laundry room. One was afraid to walk down the stairs alone because a girl had once pushed her down so now, for protection, she descended with the nun who walked down backwards to ease her arthritis. It was finally determined that the three were too old and getting in the way, so they were sent to some other institution.

The longer I lived in the convent the more dependent I became. And the more dependent, the more I grew to like it. But one morning I woke up to a cap and gown and was told to get out and find a job. There wasn't any such thing for someone like me. I didn't know how to take care of myself; and they told me I had a low I. Q. The only money I had I borrowed from Terry's ugly old English father. Potential employers didn't like the clothes on my back and they didn't like anything they'd heard about 11 those girls from the convent." Finally, Mrs. Parrot came and took me away to Urchin Hall.

Helda came there to see me every month too, and visited her three younger children at the Probation Officer's office, where Mrs. Parrot sat behind her desk and watched. The children didn't know she was "mother" they thought she was just some lady who brought them toys every month. Helda had six children at that point, and they lived in six different towns. After Lester got out of prison, Helda had another baby. She was called unfit mother, unfit wife, unfit woman. She knew how to fuck. She used to tell people she'd like to live in a brothel. Maybe she was all the things they called her. Maybe she did live in a brothel. I don't know. I never understood her either. Lester got his job back and everyone felt sorry for him because he'd been through so much.

When I couldn't stand it anymore in Protective Custody, with all the babies and no privacy and the overcrowding, I decided to take things in my own hands and go complain to Mr. Bgdick himself. Bgdick the Big Boss of Probation. When I got there, after walking a mile or so, a woman locked me in a room and told me how much trouble I was causing. If I started behaving myself, she said, they'd try to forget all this. I did as I was told. Pretty soon, they started renovating Urchin Hall, and we were all moved to the wing of a county hospital. It was two long rows of cast iron beds; half a dozen cast iron cribs; mattresses on the floor.

One little three-year-old was hanging on the crib where his six-month-old brother slept, hanging there for hours, clinging to the crib with one hand, sucking the thumb on his other hand.

The children were always taken away from their families and brought in at night. Lying in bed, first we'd hear the cops talking, then the little kids crying. Siblings would be separated before they were put to bed, separated right away to get them used to being separated. There weren't too many foster homes for more than one. That's what happened to my brother Tommy and me one time when we were in Urchin Hall between foster homes. If we got too chummy, we'd just get hurt later.

Because I was older, I'd often help with the kids being admitted, washing the dirt from all those bruised bodies.

"What's wrong with this little girl?"

"She was raped and she's deaf."

"So you don't know her name or age, but she looks about ten to me."

Later:

"A little Jane Doe arrived, Linda, do you wanna help bathe her? She's real scared."

"Where'd they find her?"

"Left in an apartment downtown."

"How old do you think she is?"

"Um, two at the most."

Later:

"Linda, are you awake? Ten kids were just brought in, their mother was shot in their apartment in front of them."

"You gotta be kiddin man, where they gonna put ten kids?"

"We'll let the little girls sleep together. Push those mattresses together over there."

"How are they gonna find ten foster home~?"

I sat up all night watching those seven little girls snuggling, then weeping quietly because someone had said, "Shhhh." Their father was released from prison to take them home.

I used to wonder if there was only pain in the world.

County buildings all seemed alike to me: brick and wire. Moss would grow between the bricks and I'd lean up against the building in the playground and rip the moss off the wall, then shred it in the palm of my hand and **let it fall to the ground.**

Shortly after we were moved to the county hospital, Mrs. Parrot arrived with a woman who was supposed to be my new foster mother. She was there to *see* me before taking me home with her. The woman fell in love with some rumped little kid with mismatched socks on, but got me.

"Do you want to go home with me?" she asked.

"I don't give a shit where I go," I said. She ignored it, and took me home with her. Maybe she needed the money.

The woman's name was Frisha, short for something or another. She never stopped talking the whole week I was there. I have no recollection of anything we talked about. I only remember feeling overwhelmed, and sitting with my hands clasped between my knees. She had five children who were small, who would sit on my bed in the morning and jabber to me.

Next, Mrs. Parrot took me and my three cardboard boxes to a home in San Francisco. I was not looking for work at Frisha's, which upset Mrs. Parrot, who gave me all kinds of advice on how to look for work, like being more pleasant and more mature in my approach. All of which had something to do with being less honest.

She left me in a home with an old woman who was diabetic and needed insulin injections. The woman hated me because I was a Catholic. On the other hand, she liked civil rights and John Kennedy.

I found a job in an insurance company and started paying my own rent. I was told by the courts how much to pay and when to start. I was told I had to live in a foster home, that I could not live in an apartment. I didn't want to live with this woman but I paid her rent and looked around for another place to live. I paid her the rent in cash and didn't get a receipt. I got a letter from my probation officer telling me if I didn't pay the woman rent within five days they'd come after me. I had fearful fantasies of a county car pulling up on Montgomery St., of Mrs. Parrot storming the file room of the insurance company, of me being dragged, kicking and screaming, to some juvenile/adult debtors' prison. I managed to refresh the woman's memory with some threats of my own, and she called Mrs. Parrot and told her I'd paid the rent.

I moved myself to a Catholic residence for women because Frisha recommended it. Frisha wrote and called often. I think she was genuinely interested.

The Mother Superior at the residence was hesitant about having me, because I'd been to Holy Terror. Everyone knew what *those* girls were like. She asked me over and over again if I was going to obey the rules. They'd never had a girl from Holy Terror before. Mary's ugly ducklings.

I put my three boxes of things in my new room. When I opened the door I was confronted by a retarded midget who wanted to know if I'd cleaned my room yet:

"You cleaned your room yet?"

"I just got here."

"I clean my room every day. I dust, I mop, I sweep. You cleaned yours yet?"

I just got here."

I clean my room every day."

Then there was a woman who always sat in the same corner, of the same hall, laughing hysterically, but she was crazy anyway and spoke five languages and never worked, but sat laughing in a corner, an eerie laughter that rang through the halls day and night. Neither the midget nor the crazy woman had ever gone to the Convent of the Holy Terror.

I met four women who lived at the residence who worked in the same part of town as I did. They all sort of dressed alike, talked alike, acted alike and were all saving their money to go to Europe.

When I was still new to San Francisco I thought it was as frightening as it was exciting. Skyscrapers, flashing neon signs, hills and curves on small streets and more hills. People on the streets downtown seemed to be coming from every direction with packages, cigarettes, pipes, overgrown purses, some of them reading the paper—all rushing, rushing. An occasional wino would be digging through the garbage. I'd cross a busy intersection and watch the cars glaring like hungry monsters waiting to roar over me. I didn't see the city at all while I lived in the convent, and only saw the blue-gray outline of it when I was a little kid in the Oakland projects. Occasionally, on a sunny day, I'd meet the women who all acted alike at a park nearby. They'd all talk about clothes and the letters they got from their parents and how much more they had to save for Europe and about their boy friends who also all acted alike. I'd sit and watch the children; listen to the women, s words pouring from each mouth, dissolving into space.

"Linda! Linda!"

"I'm sorry, were you speaking to me?"

"Yes, we were just saying how we like coming here and watching the children play. We can hardly wait to have children ourselves."

I tried to imagine them all pregnant and married, living in a row of tract houses somewhere. They all tilted their heads in the same direction, squeaked in the same tone of voice, and smiled the same forced little smile. One day I could no longer sit with those women who all acted alike in the park. The children were becoming the children I'd never forget, the dirty, bruised ones. Those children weren't happy, they were angry; and their eyes didn't glow, they glared. The fence swayed around me, and I left and went back to the office.

Later, at dinner in the residence, I told the four women that I wasn't able to sit in the sun for very long.

Pat was at my table that night. No matter what she wore she always looked like a truck driver. We had to wear a dress to the dining room. I never knew Pat's last name; and, although I didn't know her very long, she always seemed like a long-lost friend to me.

Terry was living at home with her father. She asked me to come over one afternoon. Since it was late when I decided to go home, Terry's father offered to drive me. Although Terry'd convinced me he was a wonderful person, I felt uneasy about letting him drive me home. I took the street car to the stop near the residence, got off and realized someone was following me. I could hear my heartbeat echoing back and forth across the street. My feet banged the cement like thunder. just as I got to the door of the residence, a man came up from behind me, pushed me against the door, put his hand over my mouth, and told me not to make a sound. I relaxed my body enough to get his thumb between my teeth and bit down as hard as I could. He jumped and yelped and I screamed and a woman leaned out of her window and blew a whistle and Pat ran down the street after the guy screaming,

"Come back here you sonofabitch!" The guy disappeared into the park before Pat got near him.

I sat down inside while someone called the cops and someone else gave me an aspirin and took my pulse. It was over, I was all right, but they were all scared. Mother Superior floated down the steps just as the cops arrived. She wanted to know if I had come in before eleven, which was curfew; and the cops wanted to know what I was doing wandering around on the streets alone at night. They said they probably couldn't catch the guy anyway.

The cops left, and Mother went to bed; the four women who acted alike went up the stairs with their arms locked together giggling, "Wow! this is exciting!" "I'm kinda scared, I think I'll leave my light on tonight." "Me, too." The woman who laughed her eerie laughter stood nude at her door and spoke to me in a language I wasn't familiar with. The retarded midget who had begun calling me sis held my sleeve and walked behind me sobbing, "Sis! Sis! Hey ya okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay, I'm going to bed now."

I'd just turned out the light and crawled into bed when Pat tapped gently at the door and came in. She sat on the bed and put her hand on my forehead. Warm flashes raced up and down my body and I tried to speak but had a huge lump in my throat. She told me not to worry, that if she ever saw that guy again she'd beat the bell out of him herself. I wanted to put my arms around her but pushed a thank you out through the lump in my throat instead. She leaned down and kissed me on the cheek, then left. I was wet everywhere and couldn't sleep.

Call your grandmother at U. C Hospital. I looked up from the pink phone message. "I hope she's all right," Mother Superior said softly.

The thought of anything happening to her scared the shit out of me. It took me forever to find a dime for the pay phone. It took forever to get through to the hospital.

"Grandma?"

"Well, you finally called. Helda's here. We was hoping you could come see me up here."

"What're you in the hospital for?"

"I had to have my uterus yanked out. Gotta sear you wouldn't believe, but all covered up now. Got the nicest doctors checking on me. I said, 'When can I do my pushups again,' and, ha-ha-ha, they said, 'Tushups!' I said, 'That's right, boy, ten a day.' You shoulda seen their faces, ha-ha-ha, imagine a sixty-year-old woman doing pushups! Are you coming tonight? Because if you are you better hop on a bus now. I think you transfer twice from where you are. Get on over here! Visiting hours are over at seven."

"Okay, okay, as soon as I can."

When I turned around, Pat was standing there watching me. I blushed. "Hey, bow are you, Pat?"

Her eyes danced over my face. "You gotta go some place?"

"My grandmother's sick, so I'm going to see her in the hospital. "

"You want me to go with you?" She cleared her throat. "I mean, so you won't have to take those buses at night alone. "

I tried to imagine us riding those buses together, then walking side by side to see Mrs. Turner. What if they didn't like each other; what if they both could see what I was feeling about Pat? It was written all over my face. Pat could see it; she could see my dreams, too. What if Helda mentioned Lester, and getting Lester's dinner, and all that? Or Pat might talk about the bars to Mrs. Turner, who hated bars. It was just too complicated.

"I'll be all right. Thanks anyway, Pat."

Helda sat next to Mrs. Turner's bed. She had on a little straw hat with a polka dot rim, and her dress had crawled up above her thick knees so that her underpants showed. Until we left, Mrs. Turner kept telling her to pull her dress down, and Helda kept shifting her body from side to side, this way and that.

I kissed Mrs. Turner's soft, lined cheek jettied with blue veins. Her face smelled like Ivory soap. "Looks to me like you're gonna be up doing pushups in no time," I said.

"Where've you been? We been trying to get ahold of you since I got here. I'm going home with Helda tomorrow, you know."

No one, especially Mrs. Turner, mentioned Lester. To Mrs. Turner, Lester didn't exist. Mrs. Turner's worldly possessions, the same as mine; in boxes, the same as mine.

I kissed Helda's forehead. It was cold and wet. I looked into her eyes, glassy-green and vacant.

"Mama's going to stay in your old room, Linda. And I hope she stays awhile."

I twisted in my chair. I didn't want to hear about that house.

"Oh Helda, I know, I know! You only want me to come stay with you because it's the only time your kitchen gets cleaned!" Mrs. Turner was joking. But it was true. She was always going to stay with her daughters just to do their work for them.

The day I left Helda's, it was a Holy Day of Obligation on my Catholic calendar, the Feast of the Assumption, when Mary went to Heaven.

Mrs. Turner came with two of her daughters and a girl cousin of mine from Oregon, where Mrs. Turner had spent the last year.

None of them seemed to know what was going on; worse yet, no one seemed concerned. They were all buzzing around the house trying to decide who was going to sleep where. I sat on my box of things and waited for Helda to get ready so she could drive me to juvenile hall. I looked out through the dirty yellow curtains in the living room. There was a musty smell in the air.

"The Bible says. . ." Mrs. Turner rambled on and on, wringing her hands, wandering around the house and not looking at me.

My two brothers stood staring at me. My little sister sat on my lap with her thumb in her mouth. They didn't know yet they wouldn't be coming with me. They would come after I was "placed. " I didn't have a place so I had to be put in one. The almighty "They" didn't want me to be with the younger children.

Mrs. Turner grabbed my brothers and told them to go upstairs. Then she took my baby sister and told her to follow them. They were crying and stomping around. I looked at them like they weren't there.

I sat on my box and watched. It was a movie and I was the only one in the audience,

"well now, I don't know where you're going, but I'm sure you'll be well cared for. Don't let none of this harden you.

Mrs. Turner was still wringing her hands, only now she was looking at me. "Stand up. Don't hang your head like that. You're a pretty girl and you don't have to be ashamed of nothing. "

I stood up. I was taller than she was. What a surprise. I'd always been shorter and smaller. Maybe I wasn't taller, maybe she wasn't there. I didn't exist. There was no house no Lester no Helda no baby sister and brothers no relatives wandering through the house. If I existed and they existed, why didn't we connect somewhere?

"Now don't you forget to use your crutches, Linda. You remember Mrs. Rhoades over there in the projects?"

I nodded, and my eyes focused on a piece of candy melted into the rug at Mrs. Turner's foot.

"Mrs. Rhoades got her hip broke when she was just a bit older than you, and she wouldn't use her crutches.

. . .

I thought about Mrs. Rhoades limping on her crippled hip. NO! NO! I was not going to be a cripple. Once I stopped using my crutches I'd spend hours walking in front of a mirror so I could learn to walk right and no one would point and call me a cripple.

"Now her mama told her to use them but, no, she just wouldn't listen. I don't want you to be all bent over and limping so bad like that, so you use those crutches until the doctor says you don't need them no more, okay?"

I nodded and sat back down on the box. Mrs. Turner went upstairs, where everyone else seemed to be by that time, except Helda, who told me to go to the car. She carried my box. I had to think about every step I took. First, put the crutches in front of me; then, pull my body forward. My head was spinning. Who were all these people. I looked up at the house from the car and saw my little sister crying at the window. Mrs. Turner pulled her away. No one lived in that house. Not really.

But Mrs. Turner came to see me in Holy Terror. She sat away from me and didn't say much: "How's school?" and "Do you like the food?" "What are your girl friends' names, now?"

I kept my head down and my hands folded. I wanted to go back to when I was a little girl and sit on her lap, listen to her long stories. But I couldn't because I didn't know how, so I told her, "The food is just fine and so is school. My best friend is Leona. She sits next to me in English."

She leaned over and whispered, "They told me to be careful what I say to you because the nuns might get mad." My curiosity was immediately aroused. I got up from my chair and squeezed in next to her on the couch. Other kids sat around the room with their own adults.

"Grandma, what did they mean?"

"Well, I'm not real sure, now," She snickered; and we were the only two people in the room. "Your mother had to get special permission to let me see you."

"I bet you're not supposed to tell me that."

She put my hand in hers. "Your cousin Chuck got suspended from school."

õ Wow!"

"And I gave your kitten to your Aunt Alice to take care of. You should see that kitten now. " She pulled a picture from her pocket, and we put our heads together to giggle over a photograph of a large fluffy cat licking his paw.

"Visiting hours are over."

All the adults got up and left, but Mrs. Turner took her time getting her coat on. "You know, it used to get this cold down in Texas, at the gulf. Why, your aunt and me would get up every morning and breathe that fine salt air. Yep, I sure do like the Gulf of Mexico. Maybe I'll save some money and go back some day."

Mrs. Turner said that right out loud and Mother Contrition gave her a dirty look.

I didn't see her for a real long time after that.

It was six-thirty in the morning. I dressed and dragged my body down the stairs past the chapel. Through the door I could hear the communion bells; I could see a procession of black-veiled nuns marching to the communion rail. The smells of incense and black coffee nauseated me.

Pat was sitting by herself in the dining room. I got a cup of coffee and plopped down next to her. There were four long tables but only a few people scattered around the room.

"Goddamn, but I sure hate getting up at this hour, look it's still dark out."

"How do you want your eggs, Pat?"

"Over easy."

I walked back to the cook's station and ordered our breakfasts. A light blue fog rolled past the window. The woman who laughed-who had no reason to laugh-was laughing in a corner of the dining room - Pat turned to look at her.

"I wish she wouldn't do that, it really bugs me."

"I went to her room last night. She actually let me in.

"oh yeah?" Pat laughed. "What happened?"

"Well, her room looks like everyone else's, you know, only she has all these little things like carved ivory and cups from China."

"Is she from there?"

"I don't know-she talked with an English accent. I asked her where she was born and she said, 'Born? *born?* I was not born, I was hatched from an egg in the desert.' Then she gave me some tea but I was afraid to drink it, I mean, her being like she is and all. She must have known I was afraid because she let me drink from her cup. She'd take a sip, then I would."

The cook slammed our food down in front of us so hard I thought the dishes would break, She hated her job. Some nun was yelling at her from the kitchen. We both ignored her. Pat wolfed her food down and lit a cigarette. "So how long did you stay?"

"Oh, about an hour, or less. It was a long time because she didn't say much. She stared off into space most of the time. "

When we got ready to leave the table, Pat asked, "What bus ya takin?"

"The Haight, and soon."

"I'll walk with ya."

She wore her leather jacket over a print house dress, and loafers with her socks rolled down. She walked fast and heavy down the hill and I had to run to keep up with her. Liza was at the bus stop. Until that day I'd liked Liza.

"Heey, Leenda an Paht!" Such a cute little accent. She opened her purse to get her carfare. Everything fell out. Pat rushed to pick it up. -Eet ees so-o-o good of you, Paht!"

I stood leaning against the pole with "Bus Stop" written on it. She did that on purpose, I know she did.

"I sure do like that accent of yours." Pat was smiling and sucking in her lower lip. Liza giggled.

"How do you say shit in your language, Liza? How do you say, *fuck?*" And Liza giggled and tossed her hair and answered Pat.

I was glued to the pole, pouting. I couldn't be cute; I couldn't tell Pat how much I wanted the attention she was giving Liza.

Then Liza told Pat her father was a diplomat, and Pat was so impressed she began to talk all proper: "Oh my! Why you must have visited many places in your time, Liza!"

"Oh yes, but steel I have not seen so much of thees beautiful. ceety of yours!"

Pat rocked on her heels, her hands in her pockets. "Well I'll tell you what, Liza. I've got no important engagements tonight, so why don't we go to Broadway together?"

Liza squeezed her purse and said, "Oh, that would be so-o-o nice!"

I felt dumpy and ugly; mad at Liza for being so cute, mad at Pat because I couldn't get what I wanted from her.

The bus was packed. We swung from the overhead bar all the way downtown. just as I was getting down at my stop I heard Pat say to Liza, "I'll come by tonight at six and we can go do the town."

I was in a rotten mood all day. My boss was on my case for not filing things in the right places. Some guy from another department asked me out. He was repulsive. I could smell his sweaty balls from across the room. I told him to pick me up at six.

I got home before Pat and Liza did and raced up the stairs to Liza's room. I stuck a little piece of wire with gum on it into the keyhole on her door, to jam it.

. I could hear Liza coming home, carrying on, while I was prancing around getting ready for old sweatyballs.

"My keey, eet doesn't work! ON Oh! What am I going to do!"

I wore a bright blue dress that was cut low in front so my breasts hung half out. I covered my eyes with mascara and painted my lips a dark red. I looked in the mirror and saw just about the best-looking woman I'd seen in a long time. A bell chimed over my door. My date (gag) had arrived.

Pat was leaning over Liza's door trying to pick the lock. Liza's hair was all in her face and she was crying.

"Hello Liza. Hello Pat." I sang, "Wbat seems to be the trouble?"

"Ah gee, poor Liza here can't seem to get her door open.

"Oh what a shame! I'd just love to help but one of the executives from work is taking me out to dinner and we have reservations for seven o'clock so I really must hurry on." They were not impressed. "He's also very wealthy," I added, but then I was going down the stairs and I don't think they heard me.

Sweatyballs was standing in the parlor with a bouquet of roses in his hand. I grabbed them and tossed them on the table without thanking him. When we got in the car I told him we could go to his place and it would be fifteen bucks. He looked confused, but we made our transaction.

Pat was about twenty-three, average height, a bit on the stocky side. One night she came to my room and asked me if I wanted to go to some place on Haight Street. She had on jeans, a leather jacket and men's shoes. She treated me like her sister; I began to wonder what the hell was wrong with me. I couldn't understand why she didn't drag me off to her room and make love to me.

We sat in a booth and ordered a pizza and some beer.

"What do you do for work, Linda?"

"I'm a file clerk and a whore. " I thought I would shock her; instead she laughed.

"How about that. You're a whore and I'm a queer, and we both live in that nice residence for young ladies."

We both laughed.

"I heard this was some kinda place where lesbians hang out?"

"Yeah, so it is. Where do you hang out?"

"oh, I don't know, nowhere and everywhere. This afternoon I made five bucks blowing some guy in the basement where I work."

"You gotta be kidding, man! Sounds awful--didn't it make you sick?"

"Nope, I just think about something else like I wish to hell he'd hurry up and come before someone sees us." "You're sure a spunky little shit, aren't you? When did you start whoring?"

A waitress brought our pizza and Pat pushed her cigarette out in the ash tray and blew smoke through the side of her mouth.

"Let's see, when did I start, ummm, not too long ago. I was raped a few months ago by a friend's brother. He drives the Number 10 Monterey bus and we stopped at the end of the line, then, well . . ."

"Jesus! You girls aren't safe anywhere, are you?"

I was rather taken back by her question. Was she a man in a woman I s body? I decided I didn't care and kept talking. I was afraid to tell anyone. I felt so stupid for being so naive. Who could I have told anyway?"

"I wish you'd told me. Didn't you go to a doctor? Are you pregnant?"

"I'm not pregnant, I didn't go to a doctor, I was all right after a few days."

We finished our pizza and Pat waved to the waitress for more beer.

I continued: "I met this guy on the elevator who took me out and fucked me then gave me ten bucks. He said it wa s for the good lay."

"Shit! What a cheap bastard! I woulda given you a lot more than that."

I didn't tell her I wouldn't have charged her anything; and kept on talking: "I work for this company that refuses to fire me. I've missed every other day for the past month and all I want to do is get fired so I can collect unemployment. I go to these different bars downtown and pick up guys. I usually find a young, innocent tourist. They're the easiest; get them drunk and let them take me home. I got this ring the other night. I take money and whatever I can carry that I like and leave while they're sleeping."

"Atta girl!"

Her interest and approval sent a warm rush through my body. Pat's leather jacket crinkled when she moved her arms.

"Hey, Pat, how come you're living at that residence?"

"I gotta recommendation from a crazy priest so I could live there. It's cheaper than anywhere else. I keep thinking I'll save some money and buy a truck. I could fix it up and live in the mountains. I don't make much where I work though."

"Yeah, I don't make much as a file clerk either. I could make more as a full-time whore."

Pat didn't seem to hear me. She slipped away into her beer. "I ran away from home when I was seventeen, me and this boy who joined the Hell's Angels. You know what chicks hafta do when they join the Angels?"

I shook my head.

"They hafta fuck every guy in the gang. I was one sore chick. I'll tell ya I ain't a chick anymore."

We both laughed a crazy sort of laugh. Pat had a tattoo of a cross on her ankle, the kind of cross I always associated with the Pachucos.

Oh shit there's the girl I used to go with." Pat scooted down in her seat and turned her head to the wall.

"Where?"

"The blonde."

I focused on a petite woman with a blond bouffant hairdo, heavy make-up, wearing a red dress and high heels. Pat got up and insisted we leave immediately. Why, to this day, is still a mystery to me.

The next morning Frisha picked me up at the residence and took me to her house on the peninsula. Although I enjoyed her company and the children, I couldn't stop thinking about Pat. She'd gone out again after she'd taken me home.

Frisha had fried chicken and kept asking me if I wanted the breast. "Ah, what? Oh no, no! It's all right, I'll have a leg or anything, I don't care."

I decided when I got back to the residence I'd tell Pat how I really felt about her. I'd be whatever she wanted me to be and do whatever she wanted me to do, and she could be and do what she wanted.

Frisha and her friend drove me back to San Francisco. Her friend had just come from the beauty parlor and kept saying, "Boy, I wouldn't live in this dam city if they paid me.

Twin Peaks stood out like two breasts hungry to be held. A child crossed an intersection licking an ice cream cone, pushing her tongue slowly and carefully around the edge. The moon lay between the twin breasts in the sky.

As soon as I dropped my things in my room, I rushed to Pat's room and knocked on the door. No one answered. A woman stepped out of the next room and said, "If you're looking for Pat, she was evicted." I stood gaping. "What, why?" "So far as I know, it had something to do with having wine in her room." "Where did she go?" "I don't know and don't care. Why, did she have something of yours? Let me tell you, it's gone if she did. They think she's been stealing money out of people's rooms, but we couldn't catch her."

I walked away and locked myself in my room and stared into the empty air for hours and hours.

When I saw her again, it was by accident, but in a place where you're supposed to see weird people and get excited about it. The women I was with, from out-of-state, were excited. But it was only a Saturday trip to PlaylandAt-The-Beach, full of hundreds of kids, screaming; full of the sound of "Daisy, Daisy" from the calliope at the merry-go-round. We stopped to look at a mechanical fat lady with orange hair. She stared back at us through the window in her booth, Someone pushed a button, and she laughed hysterically; we all laughed hysterically. She looks like me, I thought. I laughed anyway.

"Look," one of the women said, "isn't that Pat?"

"How can it be?" the second woman joked. "She's with some man. Pat doesn't go with men!"

How can I speak to her, I thought. How can I just say hello and then walk away? But Pat turned around. Pat said hello. Pat said, "This here's my pal Bronco." The "man" was a woman, with short slicked-back gray hair. And Pat said, "Aren't you going with them?" I looked around: the women I'd come with had disappeared. I could only stand there, staring at her. The roller coaster's blue-gray lines framed Pat and her friend. The air was filled with the sounds of screaming. "No, no," I said. "I guess not."

Bronco shook my hand, hard. "Hey there," she said, "how're you doing?" I was wearing a dumb little dress, dumb high heels. My legs were cold, my feet hurt. "Fine," I said, in a high stupid voice. "Come on," said Pat, "let's go sit down over there on that bench."

But did she mean me too? I couldn't be sure-the two of them loped off in front of me, two big buffalos on the open plains. I limped behind, pushing my glasses back up on my nose, tucking my purse under my arm.

I sat next to Pat on the bench. Her friend jumped up and bought three cokes from a stand a few feet away. She poured some coke out of the cups and refilled them with a pint of whiskey from her jacket pocket.

"Bronco here is from the valley. She works a ranch there. "

"Well now, Pat, it ain't all that great-I'm the cook."

"I used to live on a farm," I said, wishing my voice was rougher, that I could sit with my legs apart, instead of having to press my knees together so no one *would* see my pants. "I had a lamb named Tag-a-long."

"Oh yeah?" Bronco answered, half-interested; or maybe not at all.

"Hey, Bronco, tell Linda about the horse you broke."

"Yeah, uh, everyone said don't *do* it, don't try and ride that mother-he's too wild. But I did, goddamn it. I went out there every day and got on that sonovabitch and finally he gave up and now he rides as sweet as you please. Course he still won't let anybody but me ride him."

I looked away. I felt childish for having nothing to mention but a lamb named Tag-a-long.

"Say Pat, I gotta get the bus back." Bronco got up and gave the bottle of whiskey to Pat, who put it in her back pocket. They shook hands and half hugged before saying goodbye.

Pat looked into my eyes. Oh, the way she stared. "So you lived on a farm, huh?"

"Yeah. In Pleasanton."

"I've been there. A little town. Can you handle a .22?"

My big chance! I could show her I wasn't so dumb, I could show her that all she saw was just a city disguise. I propped my elbows on the back of the bench and started talking out of the side of my mouth,

" Hell, yes! You know there's still pole cats back in them hills?"

"I've heard that."

"Well, I went back out there looking for my lamb, you know that lamb I was just telling you about when your friend was here, only she left in such a hurry, you know; so there I was tramping through those hills . . . " I took a big slug of whiskey from the bottle. "And it was getting dark when I heard my lamb bleating. I started to run towards the sound when out of nowhere comes this big goddamn pole cat, and it was running

for the lamb, too. And just when I lifted my rifle, this big goddamn cat starts running instead for *me!* *Bang!* one shot, straight between the eyes. I still have that skin lying around someplace."

"Well, now," Pat said, "I'm sure glad you told me that because what I was going to ask you was whether you wanted to go over there and shoot with me . . . - She pointed to a booth where several rifles were lined up. She looked back at me. She hadn't believed a word of it.

I swallowed hard. "I'd love to, Pat, gee, Pat, I'd love to, only right now I have to get back to the residence."

I went back to that place on Haight Street a few times looking for her. But I never saw Pat again.

I don't remember the exact time or place I met Raman. I'd spent a number of months totally inebriated. I have only flashes of numerous unrelated events during that time in my life. I went to work often enough to pay part of my rent, still working in the file rooms of insurance companies, sorting folders with a throbbing bead. I managed to fake a nice smile for the nuns, who roamed the halls of the residence with dust mops, and managed, also, to go to mass in the chapel every Sunday.

Raman, at that time, was just another face at the parties for foreign students in different parts of the city. If we were ever alone together then I certainly don't remember it. But I wound up marrying him. The people at the parties were from every corner of the globe. I always felt unique coming from California. There was inevitably a fight between someone from Pakistan and India; or from Chile and Israel, a fight which had nothing to do with politics.

I vaguely remember liking these parties and what I was learning about other countries. Part of my reason for liking them may have had to do with the fact that I was drunk all the time. I stayed all night at one party and woke up between two men. A woman was in the kitchen swearing because someone had puked in a sink full of dishes. I couldn't remember if it had been me, and slipped out of the house as quietly as I could.

I hadn't heard from Terry for some time and decided to call her. I didn't want to believe we'd changed too much to remain friends. I wanted to get together and recapture some of the better times we'd had in the convent. She told me on the phone that her father would pick me up.

He was alone when he pulled up to the door and wearing his false teeth, a fact which should have made me suspicious, since he almost never wore them. In the car, I told him that I'd pay him back the money I borrowed months before from him the next time I got paid. He stopped the car and leaned over and grabbed me with his hairy gorilla arms and shoved his cheesy tongue down my throat. I gagged, I pulled away, got out of the car while he shouted obscenities at me. "You were asking for it," he yelled. I never saw Terry again, and I never knew why I was asking to be attacked by her father.

My whoring days were curbed by Terry's father and my bum leg.

I began to feel pain from my left hip to my knee. It would get so bad I couldn't straighten my leg, especially when it rained. I'd just lay in bed and wait for the pain to go away. I didn't want anyone to know that once I was a cripple. To get by in the world, I thought, you had to be strong and healthy. I made an appointment at U. C. Medical Clinic and learned I'd have to go back into the hospital for another operation.

I was waiting to go to the hospital-waiting by sitting in my room staring out the window over the head of some saint in the garden-when, one day, an Irish woman came in and sat on the bed. She told me she was going to become a nun and join a cloistered order. She told me I would never be able to see her again. She insisted that we'd have one swell last time together if I joined her and a woman who'd just got out of a home for unwed mothers at a festival for the "Holy Mother" they were having in some Catholic School. I went, of course; and so did hundreds of people who were into Mary. The entertainment consisted of groups putting on little skits. Halfway through one of them, a woman staggered to the middle of the stage and proceeded to fall on her face. It was a clever stunt; the audience roared with laughter. Then someone announced that she wasn't being funny, that the woman had had a heart attack. Immediately, the audience dropped to its knees and began chanting the rosary. On stage, someone was pounding on the woman's chest. She died anyway. I was embarrassed for her, dying in front of all those people.

I was admitted to the hospital shortly after my clinic appointment and began worrying about dying myself. The assortment of hardware attached to my thigh bone had come loose and needed to be removed. The

doctors assured me I was healthy and shouldn't worry about dying; there was, however, the possibility that I would never walk again.

I sat in a wheelchair in the x-ray room and looked at my exposed bone on film. There was a line around the neck of the femur, and the head of the femur had patches of white and black running through it. A plate was wrapped around the femur and held in place by a number of pins resembling construction nails. They were loose and were making their way through the skin. The doctors had a conference around my bed and told me they would cut through the old twelve inch scar on my leg, so I wouldn't have two scars. They told me how long the operation would take-about half a day-and how long it would take me to convalesce-about three months. Mrs. Parrot came to inform me the state would pay for my stay in the hospital and if I wanted to go live with Frisha while I recovered the state would pay for that too.

A group of women came from the residence to tell me they had had a mass said for my quick recovery and that the nuns were all praying for me.

Raman came and wanted to know if I needed anything. He went and bought me a toothbrush and toothpaste because I needed that, and a card that said "Happy Birthday" because he was in a hurry.

A long time later, after many white ghosts, straps, pins and needles, I woke up whimpering, "It hurts." What I needed to do was yell, "What *did you do to me, you goddamn fuckers!*"

Frisha took me home with her from the hospital about two weeks later. I was on crutches and still a little weak. Frisha lived in Whiterich, an exclusive suburb south of San Francisco. Her husband was in some phase of construction and helped build the fifteen-room house they lived in. Frisha had a room under the stairs near the kitchen she used for writing; she wrote articles for magazines. I used the guest room, and each of the five children had a room. Her husband had a den and both he and Frisha shared the master bedroom. I never got used to what went on in that house; I never understood what it was all about.

For example, some fellow came over one day and Frisha and I slid a tape recorder through the door of the den to record what that guy and Frisha's husband were saying. Later that night we listened to the tape in her room under the stairs and Frisha got all upset and said things like, "Yeah, A yeah! I'll bet! I'm going to use this in court, by god!" To this day I have no idea what was going on; but shortly after I moved back to San Francisco Frisha and her family moved to a three bedroom cottage in the next town.

Frisha was an alcoholic, and she'd drink more than a gallon of wine a day. I didn't notice any change in her personality once she was drunk; she was simply clumsier. She had a compulsion for gambling and joined every contest in every magazine and newspaper, and when she wasn't doing that we went to Bingo games at various churches around the peninsula. She won a few and lost a lot.

I thought Frisha was a very gifted person and could do most anything but scuba dive. She lived in many fantasies I often lived in with her. Most of her energies went to five demanding children and a husband who grunted, I want my breakfast at 6 a. m. tomorrow. " I never knew what she saw in him. Frisha had a text book of laws dealing with dependent children. I read parts of the book and found the code for my being a ward of the court, I was described as a victim of 288 of the California Penal Code, which had something to do with child molestation.

Once I was able to walk some distance I went out to look for a job. There was nothing on the peninsula so I moved back to the residence with Frisha's help.

I got another job in another bloody insurance company as, once again, a bloody file clerk and started to panic: I would be living in the residence and working as a file clerk *for the rest of my life*. I applied for every job I could think of that would get me out of there. I tried to join the Peace Corps, the WACs, the Waves; I tried to become a missionary in the Fiji Islands; I tried to become a missionary in Central Africa. The state, the military and the church all sent rejection notices.

Shortly after I moved back to the residence, John Kennedy was shot. Most everyone was off of work and sat sober-faced in the lobby watching the gruesome events on t. v. The crazy woman stood at the door nude and laughing hysterically; a nun and two other women tried to get her to go back to her room. I couldn't see

why they wouldn't let her be—she was alive in a healthy beautiful body and we sat watching death in black and white.

I was married when I was twenty years old. Three months later I was officially released from the court.

Raman and I left for Reno, Nevada in February of 1964 to get married. We took a bus and like to froze going through the mountains. The bus had to stop on some cliff to have chains put on the tires. Raman slept in the next seat and snored so loudly I was embarrassed. I was sick and kept making trips to the can to throw up or pour out my shit.

Raman wanted to get it over with so he could maintain his immigrant's visa and I wanted to have my bills paid. We were friends and agreed to make a deal with each other, to marry but live separately. I would live in a Catholic residence for women; he would live about a mile away. I wish I could say we were madly in love but that would be a lie. Love is something I've touched and looked at. But love is a foreigner to me.

When we got to Reno we stayed with friends of his and got the formalities over with the next day. We waited in a room with a number of other people, all of us waiting to get married. There was a woman sitting next to me who was about nine months pregnant. She was wearing curlers in her hair and blue cloth slippers on her feet. She popped her gum and read True *Confessions*. She walked up to the justice of the Peace with an unshaven, half-asleep male who nodded at her side through the ceremony. After Raman and I signed some papers and swore we'd be true and faithful to one another forever and ever and ever, we played the slot machines, got drunk and headed back to San Francisco. We stayed good friends until I got pregnant and demanded we marry "in the church." I made Raman attend all the orientation that non-Catholics who marry Catholics had to go to. I hated being pregnant.

When I went to doctors, I'd scream when they'd touch me, because of the pain and humiliation. The doctors would never confirm my pregnancy but only would say, "Take it easy" and "Don't go up and down too many steps." Needless to say, when I wasn't vomiting, I was running up and down stairs. The women I lived with suggested I stay in bed because I must have the flu or something; furthermore they were annoyed at my running around and exposing them to my disease. I disappeared from my job at an insurance company, and, so far as I know, no one there attempted to find out if I was dead or alive. One desperate night I decided to either kill myself or abort the thing bothering me. I was about three months along. I went and took a straightened coat hanger, wrapped a rag around it and stuck it up inside myself. The next day I bled buckets of blood. I called Raman and went down to the parlor to wait for him. The Mother Superior of the residence came out from her office and remarked how pale I looked, then told me about some girl I'd recommended to her who swore at her and had to be thrown out. I told her I was sorry, and was beginning to feel very faint just as Raman arrived. Mother said he was a nice boy even though he was, well, you know, dark.

At the hospital they told me solemnly that "the baby" was dead. Actually, I think I'd already flushed it down the toilet. I tried to look sad when Raman and I left the hospital. After the abortion we got married in the church as planned. I had a new name so I was another person overnight. This time I made a promise before Mary and the saints. I was no longer the person I was the day before in the residence. I often wonder if all the women I've ever loved are biding behind someone else's name. I wrote to Raman's sister in India, because I decided to become an Indian woman. Indian women knew who they were.

We moved into a dingy little apartment in North Beach that was in the middle of the steepest hill I'd ever seen. We applied for jobs at the same company and were both hired. Raman had a master's degree and had worked as an economist for the Indian government and this company hired him as a bookkeeper. I worked as a file clerk with a woman who drank her lunch and complained about her old man a lot.

I spent hours trying to teach Raman how to be a regular kind of American. I'd help him with his speech patterns and enunciation. He was a kind and gentle soul and resented my telling him he had to be louder and more aggressive. I told him who the people were who would help him and pointed out the pricks who were out to cut his throat. He was always afraid to ask for a better position or more pay because they'd convinced him he wasn't qualified and didn't speak the language well enough. Then they'd give the job to some white prick who wasn't half as qualified., Raman became a tool I had to develop in order to survive.

Since we were a mixed couple I thought we had to play the slave/master roles, just like people on t. v. I hated the people I was trying to be. Raman's suits never fit him right because he was small and it embarrassed him to buy them in the boys' department. I told him he combed his hair all wrong; I told him to trim his bushy mustache. Raman had studied palmistry in India, and I'd bribe my friends with a palm reading to get them to come over. But they weren't used to mixed couples and acted very uncomfortable. The few mixed couples we knew made me feel uncomfortable.

I got pregnant again, and, in spite of feeling nauseous, decided to stick it out and see what my creation was. I was pregnant for the full nine months and *knew* I was going to have a daughter. While I was in labor I moaned and cried.

And I screamed the screams of a woman taught to be silent. The nurses on the floor thought it was disgusting, screaming over the birth of a child. My doctor, a Japanese woman, told me she had been in an American concentration camp when I was born; so I cried for her and my own birth and she held me in her arms just before my little girl forced her way into the world to join its few beautiful, misplaced people. That helpless little body screamed the screams of a new beginning.

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After the baby was born, Raman and I went to India. It was the first time I'd ever been on a plane, or east of Reno, or very far north or south. On the night of June 3, 1966 we followed the sun's rise to New York, where we stayed a few days before flying to London.

Next to San Francisco, New York seemed cold and hostile. We took a ferry around Manhattan, under dozens of bridges and the next day flew on to London where we stayed a week and saw the Changing of the Guard and did other touristy little things people do on vacation. We flew over Russia, over miles and miles of forest to the Moscow airport where we stayed for a few hours while the plane refueled.

We arrived in New Delhi shortly before dawn, but decided to stay on the plane until we reached Bombay. A man, a worker, moved around the plane on his haunches, wearing dirty brown rags and using a rag and a broom without a handle to clean the seats. I don't believe he ever stood up straight. Certainly he would never wear a white uniform or run a vacuum cleaner.

Bombay, the day we arrived, was the hottest place I'd ever been. I got my first cultural jolt after leaving the airport. Huge buildings tower over a whole population of homeless people. Millions of large vacant eyes stare from hungry bodies. We rode on a bus through streets cluttered with animals and people who didn't seem to have a particular direction or concern for cars. We went to the train station. We were going to Poona, a town outside of Bombay. We stood, sweating and swearing, waiting for our train, with thousands of other people who may or may not have been waiting for a train,- and suddenly we were bombarded by beggars-men, women and children with thin bodies and swollen stomachs. I've had nightmares ever after about these people who could be me or you or our best friends.

I felt full, my body strong and healthy, happy and unexposed, The people walking toward me were starving; bad painful eyes; were moaning "Amma, " '~Amma-: "Feed me, " "Feed me. " They were all coming toward me with their palms outstretched to the heavens. I passed the change from my pocket out to them but they kept coming, in the thousands, in the millions, with their palms opened to the heavens. I had no more money, so I gave them my coat and then they began ripping off my clothes, tearing at my body, taking everything I had; and millions of starving bodies trampled me with their palms stretched to the heavens and kept walking; starving, moaning, "Amma, Amma."

We stayed with Raman's sister in Poona. She lived in a two-room apartment with her husband and three children. They were south Indians who'd migrated north. Raman's brother-in-law worked for the government and had to live where they sent him. Housing was scarce and they were lucky to find that place. At night we'd have to board up the windows. Because Indian and Pakistan were fighting, a blackout was enforced as far south as Poona. Raman slept with the older children, his brother-in-law on the floor, and his sister and I slept on the bed with the baby. I never heard sex discussed in any way while I was

there. I thought that strange in a country where there are so many people.

Every morning a servant girl would come to the door and we'd give her the pots and clothes and she'd grab everything up and toss it to the other end of the courtyard causing one hell of a crash. Dirt was like cleanser, and she'd wash the pots with dirt and water and beat the clothes on a rock. She was young and rugged looking and wore loads of bracelets and painted her arms with redcolored designs. After I learned how to wrap a sari, it was all I wore for the rest of our stay there; it was just more comfortable.

India is a land of total mystery; a whole land of "How come?" and "Why?" If someone were to ask me "In India do they. . . ?" I would answer, "Yes, probably," before they completed the question.

I got dysentery, like you're supposed to, and was taken to a doctor a few miles away. We went through narrow dirt alleyways, through mud and cattle, chickens, and squatting people to an office in a little cave-like building where a black angus was sprawled in front of the door. We had to maneuver and climb over it since it wasn't polite to ask the cow to move. A few very sick-looking people sat inside, and pictures of diseases covered the walls with vivid color. A fan spun from the ceiling. A doctor of sorts appeared wearing glasses on the end of his nose. He sat behind a desk piled up with dirty paper and looked over his glasses and said, "Rice and buttermilk, that's all she may eat. " Then he went to another room and washed, and mixed up some concoction and gave it to me to drink.

I couldn't stand the rice or the buttermilk, so after a few days Raman brought me some cornflakes. I poured milk on them and gobbled up half a bowl before I discovered it was full of insects. I hated insects and killed them like they were my bitterest enemy-and everyone would gasp, "Co-exist! Co-exist!" The Indians simply could not understand my dislike for insects, and I had no explanation.

Having diarrhea in India is a trip in itself. The latrine was in the hall and was shared by all the people in the building. It consisted of a flat basin on the floor with a bulb hanging on a chain from the ceiling and a pipe with a faucet near the floor. I'd squat down and cling to the pipe, then turn on the tap and wipe my ass with my left hand. It was very important to use the left hand. My right hand would cup the water. There was a drought in that part of India at that time, and the water was turned off except for six hours a day. So I'd have to remember to bring a pot of water with me to the latrine. There was no graffiti on the bathroom walls. The poor people in Bombay paid a rupee for a gallon of water and fought over the water, while the rich and a few others continued to get their water free. A few months later, when we had gone, Bombay suffered one of its worst floods. We had to take a cab around the outskirts of the city to get to the airport because everything was under water.

Eventually, I began to get better. One morning, I woke up stretching. The baby was sucking my breast, her little feet and stomach pressed against my stomach. She was only half awake and kneading my breast with her little hands. My sister-in-law lay beside me. Her two-year-old was whispering in her ear. Her husband was doing his yoga on the veranda. Raman was sleeping beside one of his nephews and was snoring loudly.

Sister-in-law said something about my breasts shriveling up before she got up to fix breakfast. It's true they weren't as full as they were before I got sick. I looked at my flabby breasts that would fill out as I got better. The baby was now fully awake, tossing her arms and legs around, cooing. Some of my milk was dribbling down her cheek, The neighbor woman from across the hall had told Raman it was good I nursed because the baby might get sick otherwise. It was unusual for her to see a Western woman nursing. My sister-in-law told me that no one would marry that woman across the hall because her older sister was divorced. When I first met her, she would ask if I understood English. I didn't answer, but everyone else said, "Yes, she can speak English."

Sister-in-law was flattening some pasty-looking stuff in her palms and throwing it into a hot pan of grease. Raman's nephews were shaking him, telling him to get up. A stray cat was perched on the thick stone windowsill waiting patiently for scraps.

Raman took his little nephews to a room off the kitchen and bathed them, pouring water over their warm flesh with a pot of water dipped from a large barrel.

The nephews were screeching with delight. Brother-in-law took the baby and bounced her on his lap, chanting ragas. I dragged myself down the hall to the bathroom. When I came out, the woman from across

the hall stopped me. While we both arranged our saris, she told me, " You should start feeding your baby pabulum in a couple of months." Her nose ring dangled when her head wobbled back and forth. "Yes, we'll be back in the U. S. by then and I'll give her baby food." Then, when I told her that baby food was everything from string beans to mashed lamb, she got concerned. "Oh no! no! no! you mustn't feed a baby that kind of food until they are a year old!" I loosened my neck and let my head wobble back and forth to show her I agreed with her even though I didn't. After all, what did she know, a woman no one would marry. She followed me back into the apartment and Raman put another banana leaf on the floor for her so she could have breakfast with us.

The baby was being passed around the table with the buttermilk. The two-year-old sat on my lap and ate from the same leaf, sucking the buttermilk and rice off his fat little fingers and imitating my English. The two older boys skipped off to the rickshaw they drove, hand in hand and giggling. Raman went with brother-in-law to work. I don't know if they left hand in hand.

Two holy men came to the window ringing bells and chanting. Sister-in-law gave them some change from a mud pot near the oven.

The cleaning woman came, and sister-in-law and the woman rambled on and on, wobbling their heads up and down. We gave the cleaning woman the cut-up loin cloths we used for diapers.

The two-year-old peed in what was left of breakfast. I put coconut oil in my hair, then brushed and braided it, like sister-in-law did. Then I rubbed the baby with oil and bathed her shiny body, and dried her with the end of my sari. She was squeaking and cooing. Before I diapered her, I bit her fat little bottom. The cat was prowling over the leftovers. The woman across the hall joined in the conversation with sister-in-law and the cleaning woman. It became a chorus of head-wobbling. The two-year-old squatted down with them, mimicking them.

An hour later, I followed sister-in-law to a horse and carriage. The woman across the hall followed with the baby in her arms. The two-year-old sat on my lap babbling, in Tamil and baby talk. When I asked sister-in-law if we were going to get flowers for our hair, the little boy said flower very clearly, and I kissed him for it.

The carriage bounced down the street. Yes, we would get flowers and buffalo milk plus fresh fruit and some rice on the black market. Rice was being rationed, and we never seemed to have enough of it. The carriage made its way through cobbled streets lined with stone mansions and neat gardens closed in by thick stone walls. At the end of this street, we turned left and passed a petrol station and dozens of little huts made of tin and mud. People were slowly moving around the huts. A small nude child stood watching us, a transistor radio in her hand. Sister-in-law muttered something about "those thieves."

The street suddenly became very busy: a bullock cart followed by a double-decker bus; people on bikes weaving through cars and chickens and goats; solitary cows. I had always thought cows naturally moved in herds, but I guess maybe we made them do that. A woman walked past us with a big flat basket filled with cashews on her head. A long line of people were waiting on one side of the street to get into a movie. Over the theater was a picture of a man with his hair slicked back and with one eyebrow raised to a woman with flowers in her hair and a dot on her forehead. Over the picture were some Hindi letters. Sister-in-law and the woman from across the hall both said in English that they wanted to see that particular movie. Several couples of men passed us holding hands, and a very old man sat on the curb picking lice from his balls. On the other side of the street, along line of people waited for the bus that was patiently following a bullock cart. At the intersection, a policeman in white shorts stood on a platform blowing a whistle and waving people on. And no one paid the slightest attention to his signals. We passed two blocks of American-looking store fronts. Shortly, the road began to widen and finally opened into a mammoth marketplace that smelled like dusty garlands, incense and curried sweat.

While sister-in-law stood at a booth examining strings of garlands, and the woman from across the hall moved through the noisy crowds with the baby, I squatted down next to a woman who was nursing a child that must have been five years old. A large man in a turban ran through the crowds with a cobra in his hands. He leaned over me and said in perfect English, "If you don't give me some money I'll let my snake bite you." The snake's head swelled and darted back and forth at me. It was hot. I had no reason to be afraid

of an old snake-he was holding it wasn't he? The woman nursing the child left, and people started backing away from the man. I said, "I don't have any money so go ahead and let the snake bite me. " He ran off through the crowd. Some people were pointing at me and mumbling. I was frowning because it was hot.

The woman from across the hall bought us each a Fanta to drink on our way to get rice. It tasted like colored water and it was as hot as the sun. I was sweating like a sow.

The carriage stopped at a large house with a walled-in patio. We went around the house to a garden. Several women there covered their faces with the ends of their saris until they were sure we were not with men. The two-year-old stopped to pee against a coconut tree. Sister-in-law put five pounds of rice in her bag. I guess she paid for it. Our next stop was the cleaning lady. The horse was wet and tired and the carriage moved very slowly down the bumpy path to the cleaning lady's mud hut. Several children gathered around us, excitedly laughing and talking. We greeted them all with our palms pressed together. The cleaning woman walked around her hut to milk the buffalo and talk to sister-in-law in their native language. I felt excluded, The woman from across the hall must have sensed it and patted my arm. The baby was chewing on her bangle. The two-year-old stood staring at another two-year-old, who stared back. The driver put the can of milk on the carriage. The horse barely made it home.

That night we covered all the windows, lit an oil lamp and listened to a woman on the radio announcing the blackout in twenty different languages, then listened to the radio squeak and moan the latest popular songs.

I sat on Raman's nephew-the oldest one-and pulled his tooth. He hated me until I told him about the tooth fairy and gave him fifty naye paises.

We got up very early the next morning to leave for the train station. We were off to visit the family property in the country, and more relatives. Sister-in-law fixed us all kinds of food for the trip. I promised her I would bring back a suitcase full of rice, and I did.

Raman's school chum drove us around to see Raman's relatives in his fourteen-year-old English car. Chum was with his chubby little daughter who was practicing her English on me. "The dog has spots, " she said. What dog? I didn't see any dog, and I told her so. Raman's youngest sister lived with her mother-in-law whom she hated! The mother-in-law wanted a larger dowry for her son and would not let little sister rest until she got it. Raman told me that. I told him to give all the property to whoever wanted it. What were we going to do with a bunch of old coconut groves and rice paddies, anyway? I think he finally divided it between his three sisters before we left.

Chum pushed the little car through a buzzing curious crowd. We had little sister, who must have been at least twelve months pregnant, with us. I felt like we were rescuing her from the wicked mother-in-law. Little sister said in her loud, gruff voice, I heard you were shy." I am not," I answered shyly. I had thought Indian women were more reserved. She grabbed the baby and sat her on her huge stomach. Then she told me about all the people she hated in the village. "Mohandas borrows things and never returns them, Gita's children don't want to go to school, that Sitadevi lies about everything: if I tell her I had twenty guests she says she had thirty-five . . ."

"Oh god, I know, I have friends like that in the U.S. and they're so boring." We both bobbed our heads around. When I asked her if she liked living with her mother-in-law'she said, "Well, you know, it's the way we do things in India." Then I knew for sure she hated her mother-in-law. We drove to the heart of the village that consisted of six stores and a petrol station. Chum was bent on giving me some saris before I left. He seemed to think I wore them in the U. S. The sari shop looked like a library to me. We took our sandals off at the door and sat in the middle of the room. Little sister's voice softened. Rows of shelves holding neatly folded saris of every color and print surrounded us. The shopkeeper showed us blue and green saris. We fingered and examined each one carefully; then little sister took a silver sari and I took three plaid ones. Chum made a big western deal out of paying for them. Then Raman and Chum went to Chum's house with the chubby little girl. Little sister and I went down a narrow alley through the village. I held my baby against my breast and little sister struggled to walk with the one that refused to be born. A whole string of little girls skipped and danced after us in and out of the gutters. One of them, with long shiny braids and garlands in her hair held the end of my sari. The other children were asking all kinds of

questions in Tamil that little sister was translating as fast as she could. They seemed afraid to get too close to me.

"Who is she?"

"How can she be your sister?"

"Is her land across the water?" They all looked toward the ocean.

We stopped at a door-way cut in the wall and went around a long corridor to a half open wooden door. The corridor surrounded a courtyard with several chattering monkeys in it. A long coconut tree grew in its center, its head bowed toward the sea. The little girls stopped at the **doorway**, **not** daring to follow. Some old women in white saris greeted us.

In the corner of a small bare room, sitting on a mat, was an old woman. Little sister let go of her big stomach and bent to touch the woman's feet; then she touched her hands to her eyes. I laid the baby in the old woman's arms and also touched her feet. She had silver rings on three of her toes. Little sister whispered, smiling, "This is mother-aunt who raised us when our mother died." I stared at the mother-aunt with my mouth half open. She motioned for me to sit on the mat with her. I sat as far apart from her as I could and stared at her as if she were sacred. She reached over and pulled me closer, and we sat, our legs folded, facing each other. I looked at her face with its square jaw and strong steady *eyes*. Our legs pressed together. The baby was pulling and gnawing on one of her long wrinkled breasts. The other breast was covered by the white sari. She kissed the baby, then stared at me. The room was quiet. I realized that all the women were staring at me or at her. I looked around the room, my eyes stopping on each woman. Finally my eyes would return to mother-aunt. The monkeys were still chattering away. A bronze statue of an Indian goddess sat against a wall with fruit and flowers carefully arranged at her feet. Her breasts jutted straight out.

Little sister picked lice from my hair and told me mother-aunt liked me, and that was good. Someone brought mother-aunt some coconut oil, and she rubbed it in my hair. The oil that spilled from my hair I rubbed into her dry thin thighs. "She's afraid you've been in the sun too much and that's why your hair turned red," little sister said. "She feels bad for you because your mother must never have put coconut oil in your hair." I tried to look like someone she would not feel sorry for. Slowly, she rubbed oil on my cheeks. I took some and rubbed it on her soft cheeks. The baby was kicking and gurgling in her lap. A woman brought a round dish of little cakes and cookies. They all insisted that I eat while they watched. I ate, murmuring, "Umm, yummy" and rolled my eyes and patted my stomach. They pushed more and more on me, and little sister was giggling. Mother-aunt tugged on the bulge around my waist and said something, and laughed and threw her hands around. Then they ate with me,

Mother-aunt belched warm asafoetida and I belched sour curry. Little sister and I both touched her feet before we left.

The little girls followed us back through the alley, bolder than before. I asked little sister, "Did she have a husband? Children?" A child locked her arm in mine. "She was the first wife of the temple priest." She explained that such marriages were celibate. I didn't say anything, but I wondered if it was a plot to keep women from becoming old maids-not religion at all.

In Delhi, Raman was trying to hail a cab, "Aaa ji "

I was holding part of my sari over the baby's eyes. She was sleeping and sucking her tongue. A pink Cadillac nearly collided with a bullock cart. Two rickshaw drivers were shaking their fists at one another-, a man in a black jacket had his hand raised to a small crowd and was shouting something in Hindi; a bus came and some of the people left in it; a group of Moslem women covered in black veils crossed the street; a white Brahman bull was parked in the middle of the street, the traffic buzzing around him; three cabs came to a screeching halt in front of Raman; two strange-looking people with white faces clicked cameras at me; three cab drivers were tugging at Raman and yelling at each other in Punjabi-, a policeman

came and pointed his finger at one of the drivers and the others left. Raman motioned me to come.

We were invited to dinner at the home of some distant relative's remote acquaintance. They had an eight-room apartment on the top floor, and their front window opened on a balcony overlooking the bay.

We sat at a long, formal table. There were several men and besides me one woman. She tried to talk to me in English: "Do you, ah, like, ah, this India?" and "You only eat white bread and cows in the America?" She was a jittery little woman who was trying to be the perfect hostess. She watched our every move and pounced on us if we needed anything.

The servant poured the men wine. I wondered about the prohibition against alcohol in India: were only women refused drink? One man lit a pipe, and another a cigarette. Then they rocked back in their Western suits on their chairs and spoke to each other in sing-song English. The woman asked me more questions: "Did your baby have a sickness? Your husband tells me you had some dysentery." I told her the baby had been a little feverish one day and that we had taken her to a lady doctor in the village who gave her some medicine. But I don't think the woman understood me. She just kept smiling and saying "*Hacha! Hacha!*" Or, "Oh yeah, ya know, I see."

I took the baby to the bathroom to change her diaper. She was blowing bubbles with her spit. I washed my brown sticky digested milk off her round bottom. Next to the Western bathtub was a bottle of California wine. That 980 stuff. I bet they really think they're something with that imported stuff, I thought. I unscrewed the top and took a couple of slugs. I took the cigarette I'd stolen from the table and smoked it. The baby's head dangled from my breast; she was humming while she nursed. I hitched my sari over my knees and felt like a cheap Indian whore.

Raman's brother came to take us to the army post he was stationed at. His car was at least fifty years old. Brother's wife, Devi, told me how glad she was to meet me in perfect English. I answered with a few Tamil phrases. She thought I was funny and clapped her hands. "You must keep practicing, then you will get it right." Devi's elaborately decorated nose rings wiggled when she talked. I told her I wanted nose rings too, because I wanted to be an Indian.

We drove one hundred and fifty miles on a two-lane highway, stopping several times to get tea or Fanta at roadside stands. We stopped near a grade school and watched some children dance to a record of classical North Indian music. Devi said she had learned those dances as a child. I did too, I felt: I'm the little girl with orange flowers in her black thick braids; a ring of bells is jangling on my ankles. I'm the teacher clapping my hands, directing the children.

"There's a dead bat in our room!"

Devi looks up from her paper. "No! No! You must wear a blouse under your sari!"

"There's a dead bat lying at the foot of our bed!"

Two little nephews ran after us to look at the bat lying on its back with its wings spread and its tongue banging out. A net covered the bed, and inside the net were hundreds of mosquitoes: it looked like we were raising mosquitoes to sell.

"You did not close the net properly. I will have someone show you tonight. Meanwhile, you must get a blouse on so I can get a servant to take this bat out of here."

Raman had left with brother early in the morning, but I guess he never noticed the bat. I put a blouse on under my sari. The two nephews were squatting over the dead body and jabbering in Tamil. My breasts were two rocks. I had trouble snapping the blouse. Where is my baby? I poured some tea and carried my cup to where Devi had returned to reading the *Delhi Times*.

Before I could ask her where the baby was she said, "*You must lock your door at night! just look at this! Gangs of bandits from the hills are stealing children right from their homes and using them as beggars in the market places and train stations.*" I was getting sick; I held my stomach. "Ooh listen to this! They break the child's limb to cripple it so they can get more money! The thief feeds the children just enough so they won't starve and then he stands in the crowd and threatens them with a beating if they don't beg right!"

"My baby," I moaned. The serving girl bounced in just then with the baby who was bathed and wearing a silk dress and whining and squeaking for her milk.

A cartoon in the paper showed a map of India with stove piping running to the Himalayas to bring in water. There were countless want ads for marriages. *Wanted: Brahman lady, educated; must like to travel; lightskinned preferred; dowry negotiable.* Another page told of how government officials in Bombay were getting free water while ordinary citizens were rioting after paying a rupee per litre. I shook my head in disgust. Devi asked, "Why is America having a war in Vietnam? Everyday I read something about it in the paper."

Because we're apple pie and cow alamode and football and always right and exist to watch over you so you won't go and turn communist. "I think we're over there because South Vietnam asked us to come," I said.

"It doesn't seem that way from what I understand. It seems to be more a thing of economics, isn't it?"

Oh yeah? Well let me tell you you got nothing but a bunch of propaganda right there in front of you. "Economics? How do you mean?" I said.

"Please don't be offended. You look angry, is it?" I smile at her. After all, this is her house-, what can I say? She kept right on talking-. "When I say economics, I mean that the American economy cannot sustain itself without war." *Propaganda, all goddamn propaganda.* "Linda, would you want to send your baby to a war?" *My baby's a girl, she won't have to go to war. Her kids are boys and she's just worried they'll have to fight the communists some day.* "Your husband's been in awar," I said smugly.

"Yes, I know, but we are fighting at our own border, not interfering in someone else's matters." *Oh boy, lady, you are really something aren't you?*

Devi saw that I was getting upset and suggested we go for a walk with the children. She stood in front of the mirror putting kohl on her eyes and a tilak on her forehead. She took the baby and rubbed kohl on her eyes, too. She was gentler than our village cousins. A woman was singing a popular song in falsetto on the radio.

A knock at the door that day meant two letters, both for me. Sister-in-law writes very large and says she is anxious for us to visit before we leave and that I should be sure to eat lots of rice and buttermilk so I won't get sick again and I should be sure to give the baby pabulum when I get back to the States. Then she says brother-in-law has an Italian phrasebook for me to take to Rome.

A servant was holding one nostril and blowing snot from the other into the dirt., The other letter was from little sister: It's a girl! Good, I'm glad it finally decided to be born. Mother-aunt wants to know if I am still using coconut oil on my hair.

A lizard raced across the wall and swallowed a large insect.

"You're homesick, isn't it?" Devi put on her sun glasses and we got in the car. "I guess I miss familiar things." I wondered how she had learned to use all the gears on that car. "Perhaps we can buy some lamb in town for you. You must tell me how you like it prepared,"

We stopped a bullock cart to look at some rugs. The air around the cart had a musty animal smell. The carpet merchant showed us a carpet with different shades of blue and gold in tightly woven designs-a soft careful pattern. He bragged about his mother and sister making it. I tried to imagine two women spending years weaving this rug with coffee mugs by their sides. What did they talk about? They must have stopped now and then to make babies and have babies. Devi was telling me how this was the same man she had bought her carpet from. I wondered if those women wore their teeth down breaking threads. "It's two hundred rupees." The man was selling his mother's and sister's work for two hundred rupees? Devi told the man that in America rugs were made in factories by machines. I didn't buy the rug but I did buy a plastic comb from another merchant because he told me he carved it himself out of ivory and because I couldn't get rid of him any other way.

"Amma! Amma!" The nephews were bouncing around in the back seat, pointing at something on the road. It was a mahout giving rides to the village children on his elephant. The children sat in a little gazebo on the elephant's back, while the mahout directed the elephant down a path near a dried-up stream, then back. The elephant swayed slowly from side to side while the mahout poked it with a stick and sang a Punjabi song.

Devi's kitchen was not like mine, but I did not feel homesick when we were fixing the lamb together. A stove stood on a platform next to the mortar and pestle. The baby nursed while I sat on the floor, my legs folded, grinding some spices. Devi flattened some dough, then stirred the rice. A servant man cut the meat into tiny pieces. Raman cut the onions and brother pulled the nephews off the rafters.

Brother suggested we go to an American movie. The theater was outdoors. "What if it rains?" I ask him. "Then we celebrate! It hasn't rained here for two years." The theater reminded me of going to a school game. People buzzed around at intermission getting goodies to eat during the main event. Devi introduced me to a group of women; then we stood and stared at each other. No children were allowed to watch the movie, but village children gathered around the fence to be shooed away by concerned people who didn't think children should watch harsh American films. Raman and brother were drinking rum and coke, and I drank some, too-more rum and less coke. The movie was boring-about some woman trying to get her man back. I was giggling and mimicking the actors all the way through the second half. Devi was annoyed with me. She was trying so hard to make me comfortable. I felt terribly guilty the next day, so I apologized and promised that when we got back to America I would send her a blender, nail polish, cook books, face cream. She told me to come back soon.

We went to the train depot in Poona in a horse-drawn buggy and on our way passed by a statue of the Ranee of Jhansi, who died with a sword in her hand during a battle she led against the British. The train station was as crowded as usual: some people were gathered around a fountain

washing themselves and brushing their teeth; some men in striped pajamas were rushing to the firstclass compartments with brief cases in their hands. A little skinny fellow boosted our luggage onto his huge red turban and carried it to our compartment for a few naye paises. We waved farewell to the long line of people who were seeing us off.

We beaded south to Madras; eventually, to more of Raman's relatives in Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India and the most beautiful place in the world. On Cape Comorin shore, the sand separates according to its color: red, yellow, black, white. In Cape Comorin everyone, every morning, gathers to watch the sun come up from the sea.

One morning I was sitting in front of the mirror combing my hair when I saw a woman standing at the door. I turned around and she motioned that she wanted water by pointing to her open mouth with her thumb. She was about my age and wore a ragged sari. Her feet were bare and she had a silver ring on one toe. I gave her a tumbler full of water but she refused it; she would only drink the water when I poured it into her cupped hands. I gave her a job washing our clothes every day and learned that her name was Antonia, and that she had two small children. The youngest clung to her hip like a little monkey. I don't believe she was married.

Antonia was a tall bronze woman with classic features. Her hair was dark brown with a reddish tint. I gave her a sari and fed her food I'd bide for her. Mathini, Raman's Cape Comorin relative, didn't approve of her coming around even to wash the clothes. When I'd bring Antonia through the front door to the tap in the court yard, the bodyguard would try to shoo her away, and Matbini would complain to Raman about her because she was a Christian and an untouchable and dirty and her baby had some kind of disease. But Raman would say that it was all right and go on his way, leaving me with people I couldn't speak with. I learned a little Tamil but they knew no English. I learned there are other ways of communicating than in words. People told me things I needed to know with their bodies. Anger must be the same all over the world.

Antonia lived near a Catholic mission named St. Francis of Assisi. She took my hand, one day, and led me across the sands to her home. She lived in a hamlet of about twenty huts or so. They were made of mud with grass roofs. Untouchables, Gbandi's jewels; but no one really remembers Ghandi, who once said, "Freedom means no more tears."

Antonia lived in a room next to her sister's hut. Her room's walls and roof were made entirely of woven bamboo, The earth was the floor. There were some pictures of Catholic saints pinned on the bamboo. Antonia's bed was the earth. She knelt at my side, grabbed up an edge of my sari and began crying, and saying "Amma, amma" over and over. She meant "Amma" as a sort of apology. I felt bad because she felt bad. She took me back to the village where we passed the school her daughter went to. The school was taught on the ground under a tree, by a nun. There were no books. The children just sat quietly in the shade and listened to the nun's soft voice.

Out a way on the ocean was a rock where the Indian government was building a temple to some Hindu saint. On shore, a long line of people carried stones on their heads, passing them along from person to person, to a boat tied on shore.

Usually when I wandered from our villa, the bodyguard would follow me. He was a rough looking guy with a scar on his cheek. He could have been a pirate in his last life. One day I shook him somewhere near the temple, and went to the shore to walk along the sands; then Antonia came to me with some women and children. Their bodies moved like the breeze on a warm day. They floated to my side and began dancing around me, draping me with brightly

colored sea weed and shells, laughing and singing with the sea as their music; and I laughed and sang with them. Then we danced in a circle and skipped back to the villa, where the bodyguard and Mathini stood with their hands on their hips and wearing downright pissed expressions on their faces. Raman arrived in time to stop the bodyguard from killing Antonia and I never did find out what Mathini was trying to tell me.

There was another village behind the temple where I met a man I named Peter, because he was the head of the village, and it was a fishing village. I don't know what his real name was. He was short and stocky, with a bushy gray beard and was amused when I told him, "Where I come from folks catch fish with a string attached to a pole."

Peter's little village seemed quite prosperous. The women were tough and would chew betel nut leaves while sitting in a circle making nets and masts for the boats. The fishermen left with the sunrise and came back with the sunset. Peter asked some of the fishermen if they would take me out a ways on one of the boats. The boat was a hollowed-out tree with a bamboo pole for the mast and had bamboo oars. The fisherman stood, balancing with his legs apart on the outer edges of the boat.

We went out past the rock to the blue water. We rode through valleys of waves, following some pattern the fisherman's ancestors had taught him. Then we floated back to the green water which is closer to shore and where I nearly fell out of the boat; the bodyguard stood on shore laughing. I'm sure, at that point, he secretly wished I'd drowned.

On shore, two groups of fishermen stood over a pile of fish, shouting and arguing with each other. I thought they were fighting over the fish, but Raman, who was with me that day, said, no, it was election year and they were discussing communism. I was watching the fishermen's fight when some very old women, wearing gray and white saris, without blouses, and with bells dangling from stretched earlobes, began grabbing at me. Their withered, used-up breasts were exposed; they were stretching their palms to me moaning, 'Amma, amma!' The bodyguard shooed them away before I could give them anything.

'Amma ' also means "mother" and "yes. " These people in the south were descendants of the Dravidians who were matriarchal. I walked over to a group of women. One held a new-born baby girl in her arms. I took it from her, and the woman refused to take her back. She insisted I take her with me to America. How could I? How did I know if there was a safe place for helpless little females anywhere? The woman finally took the child back and I pushed the feeling I had at that moment as far back into my consciousness as I could.

Every night Mathini would take me to the temple with her. At the temple, women wore clean saris and, in their hair, garlands. Men went bare-chested in dhotis (loincloths) and wore what looked like war paint on their foreheads and chests,

The first rooms of the temple, as we entered, had erotic carvings on the wall lit by torches. Deeper into the temple, the carvings became less carnal, more spiritual. Finally we came to the goddess' "inner sanctum" where the people brought fruit and flowers that a priest tended. The temple reeked of incense; the sounds of horns and tublas rang through the rooms. Occasionally there was a procession, in which a flower-draped deity was carried. Then we had to leave. I felt empty when we left Cape Comorin. I later learned that no one would believe Antonia when she said I had been her friend.

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Shortly after we returned from India I got pregnant again. This time we had a boy. I was wheeled out of the delivery room, drugged and exhausted, totally unconcerned about this new little creation. Raman looked at the screaming infant and choked out something about how it was a boy and what big balls he had. We were given a German shepherd dog by some thoughtless person and then were forced to move from our apartment. No pets or children allowed.

We rented a house near the ocean. A street car went past the house and the zoo was nearby. The air was always misty. We could hear the ocean and, from the bay windows in the kitchen, could watch the sea gulls flying against the wind.

I first got to know the neighbors when I gave a birthday party for my daughter and all the kids came with their mothers. A few males, who weren't fathers, came too. April lived directly across the street from me. She was a war bride from Germany and had big breasts. Our favorite topic of conversation was sex. June, on the other hand, never talked about sex. June had the rosary at her house every week. She'd send the men out and have the women in to discuss nuns and saints before racing around the rosary to get to the coffee and gossip.

May drank all the time and didn't care much what anyone did. May and I would sit in her backyard and kiss a lot, but we didn't dare tell April who would have told everyone. Wednesday managed the hotel down the street and was in on everything. I heard she pocketed money from the hotel; but, then, a lot of stories circulated about that hotel. Wednesday's husband was lovers with Pete, the ex-con. When Pete went back to prison for molesting someone's kid, June invited everyone over to her house to say the rosary for him. Some guy who lived down the street grew his own vegetables and read health food magazines to us, whether we wanted to listen or not. He decided we were in awful shape and got us to jog down the street with him every day.

I became an atheist while I lived there, which had nothing to do with my neighbors. But it upset me to discover that the god, the trinity, the saints I'd once depended on were dissolving into reality. I began to think of god as a destructive force used to brainwash people. It all seemed to be a matter of two sides, good and evil; god and the devil; love and fear of a male god and the hate and fear of a male devil. So where did I come in?

I often walked to the beach alone to be alone. One evening I sat on a cement embankment and listened to the sea roaring over all other sounds. The waves were tossing a salty mist over the sand; beer cans defaced the dirty sand. The sun moved slowly down to the water, pouring colors of pink and yellow across the sky: the final illusion. A huge gray cloud blew across the painted colors. Down a ways from where I was sitting, a dead whale had been washed to shore. I could smell the dead creature's pungent odor. Groups of people were building bonfires; some were gouging out the whale's eyes and pulling out its teeth. Men were drinking beer and throwing the cans on the sand then taking knives and cutting savagely at the side of the whale. I felt nauseated. I wished I were back in Cape Comorin where the earth had not yet been harnessed to industry and where there was a healthy respect for life and death.

During this time in my life Helda, my biological mother, became more tolerable to me. She belonged to a group that tripped around to operas and contemporary plays in the city, and "boy friend" had become "gentleman escort." She liked to paint and sold a few of her paintings at art shows; but that was before Jesus got her and turned her head around. Her feeling about the past had changed: I, for example, had not been a "bad" child but a child possessed by the devil.

I would look at Helda's short, stocky body and reddish hair and wonder if I was not seeing myself twenty years from then. She wore corrective shoes and spoke with a slight impediment. There were so many things I didn't like about her. I decided to keep from being anything like her. Still, looking at Helda was like seeing my own reflection in a distorted mirror. I had not stopped hating her for abandoning me and always making excuses for it. I hated her for living with Lester; I hated her for making me feel sorry for her; I hated her for being weak and dependent. But our biological tie told me we needed one another, **told** me to feel responsible for her; so I tolerated her.

Lester was still coming home miserable after work to stack up his reading material, chain smoke, and drink himself to sleep. But Lester wasn't a hell of a lot different drunk or sober. He complained ever night about Helda's cooking; if it wasn't the cooking it was something else. They'd been married some twenty-odd miserable years. When I went to visit the children-my sister and two brothers-once a month, and saw Lester's bent old form, I would be reminded about what had happened, and told, again and again, about how guilty I was.

Although I was married and, by all conventional standards, established, I was still not allowed to have my younger brothers and sister, who were in different foster homes, come to stay with me. But they could go to Helda's house for one hour each month while a social worker supervised the visit. I always wondered if the state was afraid I'd touch their genitals.

After he was sixteen, my younger brother, Tommy, lived with Helda and went to a Catholic high school. He was later sent through college by a boys' school the state had sent him to. But I was gifted with only an 80 I. Q. and had not been encouraged to further my education. I was led to believe that I could either marry or remain a ward of the state-which would have wound me up in a state institution learning to fold laundry on a large scale. At best I would have been taught to clean doctors' homes after massive electric treatment.

I became more and more involved with the women in the neighborhood. April and I would gather up the women at night and trot over from her kitchen to the kitchen at the hotel. May carted her bottle of wine with her wherever she went, and slurred her words a lot. June was disgusted, but came anyway. If April's old man wasn't home she'd ask the bus driver, who wore a gun in his belt, to come over and we'd all smoke a few of his joints. One day May and I went to Chinatown and stopped at every bar on the way, so we were plenty drunk by the time we were ready to head home; and drunk when we ran into this good-looking hippy woman standing on the street corner selling the *Berkeley Barb*. She was wearing a button with "Women's Liberation" stamped on it. May and I staggered up to her with our arms around each other and almost knocked her over. "Hey, wha' does that mean?" we asked. "A group of us women feel we've been oppressed by men long enough and have decided to meet and discuss it."

"Oh yeah? Like how'r you folks bein' pressed?"

"Ah, well, it's hard to explain in a few words, but one example is we have to sell the paper during the day for fear of being raped at night. Plus the men do all the reporting and organizing while we do the shit work on the paper.

"So lotsa luck with yer organization." We staggered on down the street. Then May mumbled something about how we didn't need no liberating because we got drunk any time we wanted to. Then I said I thought women ought to get raped if they were out on the streets at night, and who

wanted to sell papers anyway? It just didn't seem possible any of what the hippy woman said could apply to us or our lives. Probably because we weren't hippies,

May asked me if I'd hurt my foot because I was limping. I told her I had a blister. I'm an incredible liar. I favored my left leg when I was tired or drunk. It hardly ever bothered me, but it was all there, including the goddamn memories.

Raman was jealous of my friends and we began to fight all the time. I must have broken every dish we owned, plus a few windows, April would come over the next day and want to know if I was still alive and give me hints on how to be more sneaky. "Spit in his coffee when he's not looking," she'd say. So I would, when he was looking, and then what a battle!

I was stepping over the dog, trying to clean the kitchen. The babies were both in bed, asleep beside their father. While I was shoving the chairs under the table, I looked out the window and saw May tripping over the streetcar tracks carrying a bottle in her hand. Oh shit! She was coming over. I ran to the door before she got there and before Raman could wake up,

April and Wednesday, at that same moment, were coming out of the laundry room with two loads of sheets in their arms. They were talking and giggling with one another. I grabbed May's arm. A streetcar rumbled past us.

I said, "Hey May, let's go visit April." May had lipstick on her teeth-like she'd sucked it instead of smearing it. She had her arm around me and was trying to kiss me and I was pushing her away because everyone would see us; besides, she had lipstick on her teeth. April called over to us. "See, May, they want us to come over."

"Shit! I wanna come see you!" She mumbled on, tripping on the street car tracks but following me to the laundry room. April gave us some sheets and told us about Channel 4 in her broken English.

"Ya mean Channel 4 is showing people screwing now?" I said. "Right on t. v. Oh, look who's following us: Miss Priss herself."

We all scowled. June was walking down toward us with her arms folded and curlers in her hair. "Hi June!" we all said, pretending to be glad to see her. I wanted to find out about Channel 4, but I didn't know how I was going to with June there. She objected to everything, it seemed.

"What do you use to wash your windows, Linda?" June asked. I haven't washed them yet." For some reason, everyone laughed. I figured someone washed the windows but hadn't realized the someone was supposed to be me. Everyone looked at my windows. I bit the collar on my shirt. I guess June just didn't have much to say to anyone because next she asked April if she had to sew many buttons on her husband's shirts. While we were putting the sheets in the linen closet that was just off the hotel office, April whispered, "Don't tell June about Channel 4." We all poured ourselves some coffee except for May, who was showing everyone the scar from her appendix operation for the hundredth time. There weren't enough chairs in the office, so April pulled me onto the chair with her so that I was practically sitting on her lap; her right breast was flat against my left shoulder. At some point-when June was trying to pick her nose without anyone noticing-April rubbed the tip of my ear and softly whispered, "Did you fix Raman a good dinner tonight?"

I jumped up, away from her, and sat back down on the desk. "We had peas and rice and chicken. " I was embarrassed, but didn't know why. May's lipstick was all over her face now; I remembered the two of us making out in her backyard and then I felt weird about April-I wanted to sit on her lap and kiss her but grown women didn't act like that, did they? One of the Mothers in the convent had said it was all right to have crushes on older women until you turned thirteen but then you should start liking men or you would have awful problems. I don't remember if she ever went into exactly what the problems were. Shit, I was all right. I was married, had two kids and was trying my damndest to act Ue a grown woman.

I stuck my hand in the pocket of my housedress and, because there was a hole in it, I was able to twist a piece of pubic hair around my finger.

"Hey girl, aren't your feet cold?" June wanted to know. I told her I hated shoes. Wednesday kicked a chair, pounded the desk, looked right in my eyes and said, I wish that goddamn queer would get a job and stop lying around here." The "goddamn queer" was her husband, who was in the next room and didn't say much. I wished I could stop feeling hot springs rushing through my body. Wednesday's breast stuck halfway out of her flimsy blouse and she smelled like soft warm cold cream.

June fingered the St. Christopher medal that hung on a long silver chain around her neck and told us what she had fixed for dinner and how long it took to clean her kitchen. May was squatting in the corner drinking her wine. Somebody in one of the hotel units was playing classical music. The smell from Wednesday's dinner seeped into our pores. April looked at me, lit a cigarette and licked her bottom lip slowly. "June," she said, "how big is your husband's thing?" June blushed and got all twitchy. "Oh, April! why do you always ask those kinds of questions? It's-it's none of your business!"

"Yes it is," May gurgled, "because I wanna know!" June said she'd offer up prayers for us because she knew we needed them. Then she left, and just in time because just then a couple came in to get a room. Wednesday and April got all excited.

"A quicky! A quicky! Hey Linda, you check 'em in."

"Good evening, would you like to sign the register?"

"Give 'em unit four," Wednesday said over her shoulder. She was suddenly busy sorting papers. The man was grossly overweight and panting. The woman was half his size, very thin. Her Oriental eyes were thick with mascara. He said hardly two words, but looked at me when he did. She looked at the floor the whole time and didn't so much as mumble. I gave them the key for unit four, and told them, with a big smile, to have a good evening.

April farted, then started laughing and fanning her ass with a map. I asked her how she knew it was a quicky. May answered, " 'Cause that little whore's been here at least twenty times with a different guy."

"Yeah" Wednesday said, "so come on and let's go see how long before we gotta change the sheets."

We walked around the back of the hotel. May tripped on a clump of anise that was growing between the cracks in the sidewalk. The air smelled of anise and wet fog. Unit four was on the ground floor. The bathroom window was wide open.

"see, I keep the window open and they never close it-they're in too big a hurry." So this is Channel 4, I thought.

The couple had left the lights on. We all stood close together with our arms around each other. I was on my tiptoes and the wet air was crawling up my dress. The woman undressed very slowly. She looked bored. The man dropped his pants but we could barely see his penis with all the layers of fat that rolled down his huge body. He sat on the edge of the bed and the woman crawled around him, trying to get his little prick in her mouth. I started gagging.

"sh-h, don't make any noise."

I closed my eyes. I heard the woman choke. My mouth filled with salty saliva. Why was this bothering me and not bothering them? I opened my eyes. The man's shirt was up around his nipples. The woman lay back on the bed with her arms dangling loosely over the edges. She yawned. He grunted and dropped his body between her legs.

"Some whore. She doesn't even work with him."

"She doesn't work any of her tricks."

"That's why she gets guys like this."

The guy finished and headed for the bathroom.

"Come on, let's get some sheets and get it ready for another one." We all ran back to the office.

The sink was clogged. Raman was complaining because his lunch wasn't made and he would have to buy it at work. The toilet had overflowed and my daughter was standing in a puddle of turds saying, "Mommy, who's poo-poo is that? huh? huh?" The baby was six months old that day and was cutting teeth and I didn't know how much longer I could stand listening to his crying.

I opened a coat hanger and tried to unclog the sink. Gray, muddy-looking stuff floated in the water along with some carrots and peas. I called the landlord three times no answer. Shit! Well, in any case, I could clean up the turds and mop up the puddle. I was the only one in the whole world with a backed-up toilet and a plugged sink. It was my turn to keep May's kids so she could jog. I wished it was my day to jog. I ran to the door to let her three kids in, then heard the baby scream. He'd slipped out of the high chair. I grabbed up his soft little body and yelled, "Look what you did, just look what you did to your leg! You scratched it!" He screamed even louder. The phone rang, I put the screaming baby in his crib quick, because I felt like beating him. The children were examining the turds in the garbage.

"Hello? Oh yeah, hi June. Rosary tonight? Sure, I'd love to." June had a grown daughter and her house was spotless and there was strawberry jam stuck to my kitchen floor.

"Get out of that garbage, goddamn it and go watch t. v.

The door bell rang, the phone rang. "Hello? just a minute . . ." I ran to the door. The kids were yelling and pulling each other's hair. A tall girl stood at the door with a suitcase in her hand, a shower cap on her head, a work shirt over her jeans and sandals on her feet.

"Hi! I'm your cousin Cindy from Texas!" the girl said in the highest-pitched voice I'd ever heard.

"Who? You gotta be kidding me!" I held my head. "Well, come on in, I don't have time to argue with you." She followed me to the kitchen, telling me she was sixteen and that she had

hitchhiked up here and was going to find a job and go to school and be a doctor. I hung up the phone. Whoever had called wasn't there any more.

I got on my hands and knees and scraped the jelly off the floor. The kids were screaming through the house. Cindy wanted to see the baby. He was curled into a little ball with his thumb in his mouth, and I felt sad for having got so mad at him. My breasts were filling with milk and I knew I'd have to wake him and feed him soon.

April, May, the health food man and some other woman came in and stood around for a few minutes. The house stank. Dishes were piled up because I couldn't wash them. No one dared to flush the toilet. The kitchen floor stuck to our feet and diapers were piled on the couch. Cousin Cindy was talking a mile a minute and no one wanted to stay and visit. I didn't want to stay, I wanted to run away. But only kids ran away. I could hardly wait for my kids to grow up and run away-like my lucky aunt's kid had.

Cindy's mom called while the plumber was there and the baby was nursing. My nipples had turned into teething rings.

Cindy fixed dinner and I told her she could sleep on the couch if she didn't wet the bed. Cindy was witty and sophisticated, for a kid, She had no business acting so grown up until she was married and had kids. But she didn't want to grow up and get married-that **smartass**. Didn't she know that's what you're supposed to do?

Raman turned the t. v. on and took the two kids into bed with him. Cindy propped her feet up in the kitchen and smoked a joint. I went to the rosary wearing shoes, because June didn't like me to come to her house without them.

The woman next door was doing exercises in her bra and pants big as life in front of her window. We waved to each other. I said hello to the blind couple from a few doors away. They were standing on the corner arguing about which dog would have to go, his or hers. They bated each other's dogs. The little old lady next to June's was snipping the flowers off her tulips and stepping on them. She was humming and smiling. We waved to each other.

June's house was always too warm for me. April, May and Wednesday were pouring coffee and putting cookies on the table. May's mother came. She didn't get on her knees like we did when we started the rosary because of her arthritis, which, when we weren't praying, she talked about a lot,

I led, saying the first part of the prayers as fast as I could, but May's mother answered the last part as slowly as she could: "Holy . . . Mary . . . mother ... of. . . ." Shit! Didn't she know this was my only night out, at least the only one I could openly admit to? "Raman," I'd say, "I'll be going to the rosary tonight." And I didn't have to feel the least bit guilty about it. The other nights I went out, my stomach would be in knots. It was no way for a woman to behave-going out at night and leaving her poor husband to babysit after he'd worked hard all day. Once, April went over and talked to Raman. She told him that when her kids were little her husband looked after them at night for a few hours, so she could visit with her friends and how good that would be for me because I was cooped up all day. Then she made some flattering and flirtatious remarks, and Raman said it would be all right if I went to the rosary as long as I didn't bring any of my friends over to his house. I didn't realize it was my house, too. We never got to meet a woman who lived near June. That woman's husband wouldn't let her go out even to shop. June heard her scream a

few times and told us that her husband beat her. We all said how lucky we were, and how the woman probably deserved it.

"Holy ... Mary ... mother ... of ... God

Finally the rosary was over. April said she had seen two nuns at the supermarket and they were laughing and carrying on. A few days later, June saw them again skipping down the street with their arms locked together. I tried to imagine my Mothers at the convent skipping around.

"It's all because the Pope said they could go and wear them street clothes and short habits and all," May's mother said.

May winked at me from across the table and ran her foot up my leg and pressed it against what April called a "pussy." Whatever its name was, it was ready to have more than a foot pressed against it. April was telling everyone how her duck got horny and tried to screw the cat. Wednesday's cat would lie on her back and the neighbor's dog would lick her you-know-what. "Pussy?" April asked. June got up to give us more coffee. I dunked a cookie in my coffee and sucked on it.

"What does Raman think of your cousin's staying with you, Linda?"

"I don't know. We really didn't talk much tonight. He didn't seem to care one way or the other. I guess I'll try and get her to go to high school."

"Send her back to her momma," April said.

"I don't think she wants to go."

"You better watch it, she might warma run off and be one of them flower children. It's awful, all them kids running loose like that."

Cousin Cindy from Texas did just that. The next morning she disappeared. I don't understand why she didn't want to stay with us, I said out loud. Inside, I was green with envy. Lucky bitch ran off and became a flower in childland on beloved Haight street. I had visions of her with her head thrown back, laughing and singing, wearing brightly colored clothes and chanting, FREE THIS! FREE THAT! FREE LOVE! FREE EVERYTHING! She'd be wearing flowers and dancing with her flower friends in big circles on the street. Lucky, lucky bitch.

I kept my knees close together. I was sitting on the edge of the chair with my hands folded on my lap. "Well, officer," I was saying, "her mother did mention she was a disturbed child." I pronounced child very clearly. The two cops took down all the information and said too many kids were in that area and they probably wouldn't find her.

"My husband and I are simply concerned about her. We would like to know if she's all right." I was talking like my foster mother. I was smiling like a social worker.

The cops said they would do what they could, which was nothing. Some part of me badly wanted Cindy to be free, but I could never admit it.

My friends all stood with me in a circle in front of my house, We each had one foot in front of us and our arms folded under our breasts. Everyone had curlers in her hair, and May had a cigarette dangling from her mouth. They had come over to find out what the police had said and what Cindy's mother had said. The sun was setting, and everything was a fluorescent pink. The health

food man came over and told us it was Cindy's eating habits that had made her the way she was. Wednesday said that her sister had run away when she was sixteen but had come back two years later with a baby-and married to some handyman.

"Boy, that was lucky!" someone said. "Just think, if she hadn't gotten married most anything could have happened to her!" Some hippies floated out of the streetcar and danced towards the zoo. The blind couple's radio was blaring out the voice of Janis Joplin.

Cindy did come back, deflowered. She had her baby in Texas.

It was New Year's Eve, 1968. Everyone was going to the hotel for the party that night. I washed my windows because I knew everyone would look at them on their way to the hotel. I got a big sponge and filled it with soapy water and scrubbed. I tried to dry the windows with a bath towel. April watched me for a while from the street, then offered to help me. She told me to use vinegar and newspaper. So we did, and she took one side and I took the other while my son, who was a year old, swung from my skirt. April couldn't imagine why I didn't know how to wash windows. My daughter picked her nose and carefully decorated the windows I'd cleaned with her buggers.

"Hey, come on, go watch cartoons!" I sat her in front of the t. v. The baby had his diaper off and was trying to flush it down the toilet.

11 NO! NO! NO!" I sat him on the floor in front of the t.v. without a diaper. He didn't watch t. v. He examined his penis.

I don't know if I can come tonight, I don't have a sitter," I said, soaking my newspaper with vinegar. My side of the glass was streaked with black newsprint April's wasn't. She told me not to worry-everyone left their kids. After all, it was just across the street. "Just put them in bed, tell them to go to sleep, then come to the party. "

We finished the windows. The room reeked of vinegar. I felt like a carrot in a salad. May brought me a tequila sunrise. April sipped some old wine I had lying around. May wanted to know if anyone had invited June. No one had. I think June came anyway.

May wrapped her arms around my shoulders and told me it was all right when I said I'd bring potato chips to the party instead of cooking anything.

"Hey, I think she comes from a rich family-she don't know how to do nothing," April said, and pinched my elbow. The health food man yelled up at us from the street below. He was wearing cut-off jeans and a white head band. "Anybody wanna jog?" We told him we did. But first I went to ask Raman if it was all right. He was in another room reading some woman's palm. The woman looked like a shopping-bag lady from Market Street. A large sea gull was sitting on the windowsill. Raman didn't look up, but said it was all right if I got back soon. I believed him.

It's not easy running along sand dunes and tripping over succulents, especially after a few drinks. April and I jogged holding onto our bra straps so our tits wouldn't fall off.

When we got back, Tommy, my brother, was at the house with a girl who had a guitar she never played and a big burly guy who laughed a lot. Raman was fixing them all a drink. I had a beer. The children dragged a chair to the top of the stairs and then threw it down. Everyone just sat there, including me. I wondered if I was the only one who had heard the chair go crashing down

the stairs. Raman ran to the noise, finally, complaining about having to do everything himself. I drank my beer with my feet propped up on the table. Tommy gave me a "you-lazybitch" look.

"Listen," I said later, "we're gonna hafta split these four t.v. dinners 'cause there isn't anything else."

"That's just fine," the guests said.

"How 'bout giving us some of them potato chips?" the burly man grunted. When I said they were for the party, everyone wanted to go, including some friend of Raman's who'd just walked in. Everyone left but me. I stayed to put the kids to bed. May came over to see if I was about ready. She waited with me while the kids cried themselves to sleep. We were gulping tequila sunrises.

. . . An' so it was embarrassing because I had this terrible crush on my older sister." May was getting drunk. "I really wanted to make love to her, ya know."

I told her I'd felt that way about women before I was thirteen. But May told me she was still in love with her sister. The kids were screaming and banging their heads against the wall. I gulped down another sunrise and started rummaging through my saris.

"Yeah," I heard May say. "He threw himself in front of a train." Maybe she was talking about a movie. We both undressed and I showed May how to wrap the sari.

"I'm really an Indian," I told her and painted a dot on her head with lipstick.

"Yeah-through injections!" she giggled. I got all the costume jewelry I could find and put it on each of us. I was an Indian Princess looking in the mirror and she was one of my many servants.

"That's whadja get for plottin' against the government . . . What was she talking about? I took some plastic beads and wrapped them around my head and mouthed all the Indian words I could remember. Then I tried to do a dance I'd seen once in an Indian movie.

". . . so I said to her, on a *doorknob*? You gotta be kiddin'!"

The children stopped crying. "Yep, they're finally asleep," I said, or she said. May insisted on stopping at her house before going to the party because she wanted to wear her roller skates from high school. There was something funny about wearing rollerskates in a sari and she *had* to do it. What she didn't understand was that I really was a beautiful princess from India.

Some kids from the top floor of the hotel were throwing eggs at the streetcar when it passed and yelling, "Happy New Year, suckers!" Someone from another unit was playing classical music. The blind couple were walking their dogs. A couple of men were arm wrestling at the hotel desk. A cloud of smoke hung in the dim yellow light of the livingroom that was, tonight, a ballroom. The room was packed.

April and her husband were doing the rumba. Wednesday and Raman were doing a two-step. Two dogs were sniffing each other's behinds behind the couch. The room vibrated with too much bass.

Two women with long purple fingernails and with sequins on their faces were waving their arms, talking over the music: "So then I said when she said that, that I did actually say. . . "

Tommy was jangling the keys in his pocket and rocking on his heels.

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Someone with platinum blond hair put a drink in my hand. "You don't seem to understand-aggression is creative . . . "

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A man from one of the units was rolling May through the crowd.

"Wheee!" May screeched, pinching everyone's ass as she passed by.

Some women had their heads together in the middle of the room: "... three cups of flour, one gallon of water, a teaspoon of . . ."

April staggered over to me carrying a pint of vodka and said something about how she could drink me under the table. Someone was already under the table. April held the bottle straight up to her mouth and gulped. Pete took the bottle and drew a line where she'd stopped. I took three fiery swigs and staggered back into the crowd.

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. . . so I said to him, I said... They was filled with rattlesnakes... Come on, baby, loosen up and... Whadda mean, instant. . . ? You're kiddin', he's no bookie, he's a hit man for the Mafia . . .
."

Some man grabbed me and shoved his prick against my clit and I shoved and bumped right back, right in time with the music. Then he squeezed my breast and I squeezed his prick and then another guy grabbed me and we did the same thing.

Next thing I remember is sitting on May's lap fucking her mouth with my tongue.

The last thing I remember is being dragged over streetcar tracks kicking and screaming: "I don't wanna go home! I don't wanna go home!"

The kids were sitting on my bed in front of the blaring t. v. I forced myself to the end of the bed to turn it down. I felt like I was dying so I made the sign of the cross and said the last prayer before leaving the earth: "Oh my God ... I am ... heartily sorry ... for having offended ... I'll get some alka-seltzer. " The nuns had told us to be sure to make an Act of Contrition before we died. A nun had told us about a priest who was on the front lines of some war who was so hungry that when he was dodging bullets to give the last rites to some dying soldier he had blessed himself and said grace instead of the Act of Contrition. If he died, I don't know if he went to heaven.

Only two alka-seltzers left. I got on my knees and vomited into the toilet. Come on, fizz, dammit. I pounded my chest and mumbled, mea culpa! mea culpa! Why isn't it fizzing? I'll never be able to face my neighbors again. I have to tell them that I'm not really like that-it was the drunken princess, not me.

I'll drink the water, yeah, I'll go ahead and drink the water. If it doesn't fizz by the time I finish drinking the water, I'll suck on it.

"Haha, looky mommy!" My little girl had her hand in her pants and was laughing at me.

"I'm going to the library to study, " said Raman and left immediately. I don't know how he got away without getting sick. He was so programmed-three drinks, that's it. When did he have any fun?

No wonder it doesn't fizz, it's not alka-seltzer-it's the styrofoam disks. I'll go ask April if she has anything for a hangover. On second thought, I won't move.

June came over and put an ice pack on my head, ran to the store and got some aspirin, bathed and fed the kids, then left before I could thank her. I didn't deserve it. I'm a sinful woman. But when Raman came back from the library, I left without saying where I was going or how long I'd be.

Raman came home from the office one night and announced we were moving to Connecticut in a few months. I convinced him I needed a vacation before going and went to Florida to visit my older brother, Georgie.

Georgie was in the Navy and had come to see me just before I was married. It was the first time we'd seen each other since we were little kids. We stood gaping at one another, both feeling weird. He wore his sailor's uniform, and removed his hat before shaking my hand. Georgie's father had been awarded custody of him; and, since then, they had lived together on the same piece of property. It had a lake and a few houses on it. During my visit, Georgie's father asked me when I had been born. I told him and he decided that since he and Helda were divorced the same year that I was legally his. So he willed me half his property.

I had always fantasized about my father appearing after years of searching for me and him being a rich, handsome and famous dude. When part of the fantasy materialized, I was confused.

Most of the folks down in Florida were folks; and spent their time chewing tobacco, swatting mosquitoes, and discussing the last revival meeting and when the next dog race would start. I tried chewing with the women folk but couldn't get the bang of it. They could chew so a whole gob would be on one side of their mouths but I'd get mine stuck in my teeth and choke on it.

Georgie's father, Phil, had a garden that stretched out a good half acre from the house. Behind the house on the other side was a dense forest. One morning Phil was showing me the carrots, beets, collard greens, and peas. It was May and the air was clean and warm. Phil sat on a rock, under a tree, and asked me how Helda was doing. "She's interested in art now and paints a lot. But she says she has to paint in the basement because Lester doesn't like the smell." Phil listened quietly, while he picked up the earth in little pieces in his hands and stared at it. It was a cool, healthy-looking ground that strong, beautiful plants were born from.

"You know," he said, "I always felt guilty for not fighting for you like I did for Georgie. " I think I stopped him before he finished. "You don't owe me that. Really." I didn't want anyone else to feel guilty. If we didn't talk about it, it would go away. Phil asked me if I saw Helda very often. "I see her when the social worker comes to her house with the younger children. Lester's always there, though, and I'm still a little afraid of him." Phil reached out his hand to touch me and I moved away. He stood up and started walking. "Well, come on, let's fix us some biscuits. I make the best biscuits in the South. I make them big enough so's shy folks don't have to ask for seconds.

After dinner, Phil's second wife and some friends and relatives stayed around, chewing tobacco and spitting in a can. "What I don't understand," one old woman said, "is why none of Helda's family took any of you kids in?" She spat in a can at her feet. "Let's see now, there's four sisters, a brother ... who else?"

"They didn't want us," I answered, a little too quickly.

We were sitting on April's steps when I told everyone I was moving to Connecticut. June was popping a pimple on her knee and April was still teasing me about the New Year's party.

"If we ever come back, we'll buy a home in St. Francis Woods," I said, sitting with my back'straight and my legs together, and feeling so much more fortunate than them. After all, Raman would one day be the president of a very large company. What do you need with friends when you've got money? May sat behind me on the steps, braiding my hair. April was picking her teeth with her keys.

I tried to imagine the new friends I'd make-all wives of presidents of very large companies. We'd probably go on tours of Europe together and to banquets with the President of the U.S. and with kings and queens. ". . . pass *the sugar, pass the cream. I'll have the maid tend to it first thing in the morning.*"

I stood at the window, watching my shady reflection. I was Bette Davis with a cigarette holder, wearing a long, tight formal. April and Wednesday were running to the laundry room with coffee mugs in their hands. They waved to me and motioned for me to come over. I shook my head: "Sorry, dahlings."

The company Raman worked for in San Francisco transfered him to Connecticut in the winter of 1969, I went along because I thought I was supposed to. Our two children came along because they had no choice. Raman and I'd been married for five years by then. When he came to this country from India, his dream was to become a rich executive.

We rented a house that must have been condemned for some time. It had three full floors connected by rickety stairwells and a basement with a wine cellar. There were rooms which didn't have a purpose and stairwells that led to boarded ceilings. It took a great deal of courage for me to wander around that house alone. The door to the wine cellar was hidden behind a thick wooden door in a basement that wasn't wired for electricity. I used candles to light my way—a flashlight would have been out of character. The room was filled with cobwebs, assorted bottles of wine, and skeletons of rats from past generations. Some of the bottles had 1902 written on them. The house was engulfed by three female spirits who had died in their eighties and hung in the air unable to leave the house they had lived in all their lives. My daughter claims to have seen them. That house has since been buried under a parking lot.

We didn't know a soul in Connecticut. The heating was inadequate, the plumbing was bad, and we had to wait weeks to get a car, phone, and other things we thought were necessities. We came in the middle of one of New England's worst winters. I spent days alone with two tiny children in a completely strange place and hated both the kids. When Raman was around I hated him too. I decided to look for a job, to meet people; but the day-care facilities were nil. A few "homes" in out-of-the-way places were not what I had in mind. I began losing control over my responses to the children's demands. Raman was always gone with the car either studying or at conferences. I knew I had reached the breaking point when I found myself trying to suffocate one of the children with a pillow. The kid was crying and I couldn't stand the sound of it a minute longer. These children that I had thought I wanted, that I loved, that I would protect.... I was somehow able to stop myself from committing homicide.

I knew I had to get away from the kids for awhile. I finally found a nursery school which provided four hours a week but which required parental participation for part of that time. I really had no escape from children. Children became chains on my body; they were creepy little parasites who also tended to be vulgar and indecent.

There was really little the women there could do with spare time except buy! buy! buy! I learned more about goddamn shopping malls than I care to remember. Of course, as the children grew older, I was faced with garden clubs and charity drives, the P.T.A., none of which I had ever felt I could be a part of. I don't think I ever wanted to be a part of them. The insurance company Raman worked for would have parties which would drain me of all energy with their superficiality. We'd paste smiles on our faces and stand clutching drinks and trying to be cordial to a room full of very white, very straight people. The women tended to cluster meekly in a corner and ramble on about children's teeth and spelling bees while the men would discuss their skis and golf clubs and how one big company fucked over one small person and I would have a nearly uncontrollable urge to lift up my dress and masturbate in front of everyone. Raman and I did not fit in. I hope to hell I never do.

Raman took me, under protest, to the apartment of a fellow he worked with in the insurance jungle. I prepared myself for another dull evening. But the guy's wife and I took an immediate liking to one another, even though we didn't say much. Raman and his colleague ran down the establishment over wine and pot while Dazie and I stumbled over each other's vibrations. Sometime after this, Dazie and I became extremely familiar with one another's private parts. She was the first woman that I loved fully. I accepted every part of her as perfect.

Dazie was a real southern belle and probably one of the most exciting people I'd ever known. We made love everywhere, once, near a railroad crossing with our clothes hanging in a tree. Then we

rolled down the hill nude, while a motley group of farmers watched from a bam nearby. We guzzled bottles of wine, pouring it over our bodies and lapping it up. Nothing she could say or do could upset or anger me. It all happened so fast. One night I was a housewife and the next morning I was a lesbian.

Dazie and her husband moved in with us, and so did some homeless people from where Raman worked. I had been stem with the children until Dazie came and encouraged me to loosen up. Dazie figured everyone was part child, anyway.

Although Dazie complained about her acne scars I thought she wa& the most beautiful woman I'd ever met. She had long dark hair and soft brown eyes and a thin, graceful body. I was always amazed at how she moved her limbs so freely. Sometimes, she'd put on a record and we'd all dance with her scarves.

For the few months she stayed she made the house seem like a palace. The air was clear. Everything was alive and singing. I floated above the ground. Raman and Dazie's husband would be out trying to impress the world in whatever way men impress the world, and Dazie and I would cuddle together on the rickety old couch and watch t.v. Raman came home one night and threw Dazie out after he found us in bed together. The dozens of people living with us all poured out of their beds to witness Dazie's dramatic departure. Included in the assortment of people was Dazie's husband-who simply went back to bed because he was getting a divorce anyway.

After a month of hysteria over Dazie's leaving, I started going to meetings at some college. I didn't know what kind of meetings they were until I followed some newsmen into a building where I met Blanche, who turned out to be a neighbor. Blanche told me if a newsman asked me any questions to tell him to send a woman instead. When I asked why newsmen were there at all, Blanche said something about it's being a women's liberation meeting. I would not havQ gone if it hadn't been for the excitement and confusion surrounding the meeting. I went to the meetings a few times before I stopped to work in an insurance company at night. "Women's liberation" has been so over-used I even hate to say I went to women's liberation meetings for fear someone might think I'm trying to sell something, like soap.

But these women's meetings were in a large smokefilled room packed with women and a few men in drag. There were several dedicated women who spoke at every meeting and said we should be leaderless. A very large woman used to sit on the floor in a short dress and knit continually during the speeches. Only one woman spoke of positive goals: "No marriage! We want socialism, and no national boundaries!" but nobody seemed to like her; as a matter of fact the large woman was downright shocked. After listening to the statements women made about husbands and the media, my anger began to surface. I had enough hate for men to lead an army of women to perform massive castrations. Once, I asked a woman sitting next to me when we were going to start doing something. It seemed we hadn't talked long enough yet. I had; and I hardly ever said anything. I wanted to blow up buildings, hi-jack battleships and lead huge groups of women to government facilities to throw the men out and take over. No one felt the same as I did, but it seems no one ever does. I wanted to go to war. Everyone else seemed to want to work it out,

After the meetings, I hated to go home because it was called *home*. When Raman was there, I hated him too. I hated him for all the men I had ever hated. I hated our son because he'd grow up and become a man. I had to get away but I didn't know where to go.

.I saw an ad in the paper for work at night in an insurance company and decided to apply. I got the job. So then I became an insignificant, insufficient member of the housewife shift at Rot Insurance Company-which, I might note here, is any insurance company. I was a flunky for the key punch department, and they were someone else's flunkies. I sorted green cards from the blue cards, but the white ones were separate anyway. Rot Insurance is made up of long corridors which seem to follow me wherever I go. So I spent twenty hours a week there and the rest of the time I dealt with bratty kids and a nagging husband-not to mention tons of laundry and dirty dishes, all of which I took care of because I felt guilty for leaving home and not finding anything better than a job sorting IBM cards. Half my meager pay went to insurance premiums, taxes and various funds.

When I first began working for Rot, I wanted to wear long pants in the winter time, rather than a short dress and nylons. I was advised by mechanized robots, computerized by Rot, that it was unladylike to wear long pants. I called Rot the next day and asked to speak to the supervisor in charge of the dress code. I was told there was no such department. Surprising, isn't it? I wore my long pants to work the next night. Shortly, I was led to a man sitting in a partitioned office. He told me he had just come from a meeting of department heads (all men), He informed me, smiling politely, that I could wear what I wanted. When I sneered, and didn't thank him, he seemed confused. My co-workers continued to wear dresses, nylons and max-f ucker-over products. It helped them look and smell as unhuman as their surroundings. I looked and smelled like a milk maid from Tangiers.

Actually, for a time, I really enjoyed the women I worked with, They were reliable and sincere. I created my own history and they accepted it. No one was around to deny its validity. I told them I had parents just like theirs and, yes, they had fed me lumpy musb and I never got over it; and that Christmas was always so nice at home-cookies and candy-lots of presents and a fireplace to keep everyone warm. I enjoyed living in that fantasy. The women were long-rooted in marriages and out of ignorance, or some other force, didn't seem to oppose this or any other institution, regardless of how miserable they might have been. But I don't think they were really miserable; only struggling. I was happy being what they were. I worked with about seven women and we were all between the ages of twenty-seven and fifty. We talked our small-talk while we sorted IBM cards; and the man rarely came in to bother us.

Raman was the only person in his department who wasn't white, protestant and a graduate of some bloody ivy league college. He was always being used and taken advantage of. He was passed up for raises and treated like shit, We were both lonely and oppressed and hated see ing it in each other. But by that point, I had figured these were his problems-all I wanted was to go away somewhere but I still didn't know where. I'd look at Raman and remember Dazie and how I hadn't heard from her since he threw her out. I never forgave him for that and I told him I never would.

I began following the controversy over abortion in the paper and went to an open hearing in the state capitol building to hear a discussion on whether abortion should be abolished. The room was packed with Catholics and social workers. I sat in a little comer in the balcony and watched the heated discussions going on below. On one side of me were some women who were anti-abortion; on the other were Catholic social workers willing to be excommunicated

over the issue. The anti-abortionists sat on the edge of their seats, with anxious expressions on their faces. They kept saying, "They want to kill babies and there aren't enough now for adoption!" The Catholic social workers, on the other hand, were saying, "I wish we had a battered child to take the stand. " I thought seriously of saving the day for both these groups-but couldn't ever decide whether to consider myself a battered abortion or simply unadoptable due to age.

Then a woman with a child by her side walked up to the podium and in a very loud, very clear voice said, "I'm a mother of five children, on welfare. I'm black, I'm gay, and I'm proud! No one is going to tell me I can't have an abortion!" Half the assembly welcomed her statement with a standing ovation. My hands were red from clapping, and I shouted so loud the veins protruded from my neck. I tried to get through the crowd to see the woman up close, but ran into a neighbor of mine who stopped me and introduced me to a woman she was with. But I couldn't hear, and I was anxious to see the woman who had spoken, so I screamed my name over the noise and -she screamed back, 'I'm *Gaye*'; and extended her hand to me: which all became very awkward when I realized that "Gaye" was her name, not an invitation. Anyway, by the time I got to the ground floor the woman was gone. I tried to remember the faces of the women who had applauded her as I had, but now everyone was applauding someone else, and the faces faded.

My neighbor, Blanche, had started women's meetings at her house and I'd stop over every now and again after work. There was a group of ten to fifteen women. I never really understood groups; gangs make more sense. The women discussed problems they had with men and children in their lives, and how things could be easier for them by sharing the housework, working outside and child care. Some would discuss more personal things, like hating their husbands and kids. Lily shocked the group one night when she said she'd really like to have a lesbian relationship.

I never got into discussing myself in the group, which made everyone suspicious. They spoke another language it seemed, and said things like, *relate to*, and *how do you feel about that*, and *Id like to know more about you* which meant, you're not saying what I want to hear. I wanted to tell someone about myself but couldn't get through the language barrier. And I knew people didn't want to see and feel ugliness before their very eyes. They just wanted to talk about it.

I got to know a few of the women when they'd come to see Blanche while I was there sipping coffee. Blanche didn't know quite what to think about Lily wanting to be a lesbian but she thought it was okay. Most of the women thought it was okay but they didn't want to be one themselves. I spoke to Lily for the first time when she came to visit Blanche, and we discussed an article by a lesbian from some magazine. Sometime after that she moved in and it in each other. But by that point, I had figured these were his problems-all I wanted was to go away somewhere but I still didn't know where. I'd look at Raman and remember Dazie and how I hadn't heard from her since he threw her out. I never forgave him for that and I told him I never would.

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Lily was really into being political around being gay. We slept together; and one night I was a lesbian and the next morning I was a radical lesbian-which all had to do with getting your shit together and not depending on men. Lily was a sweet, quiet little thing who spoke in profound statements: just one heavy sentence after another. She used the words "always" and "never" a lot.

Raman was off trying to find his niche in society and had decided not to interfere in my life, since I was threatening to leave him on the average of once a week. We rearranged our lives so someone was always home with the kids. Since Raman was a nine to five person, I became nocturnal.

Lily and I spent long hours watching t.v. in my room, and talking and talking. She wasn't Dazie. I had to remind myself of that again and again. In the dark, I would make love to Lily and pretend I was with Dazie.

The minister forced Lily, finally, to move away. He would call and drive around the house several times a day. And he told her he didn't mind her having a lesbian relationship but I was not a good choice for her. I thought he was a wicked, creepy old man and I told him so. I felt envious of Lily for being able to just pack up and leave when she felt like it.

Blanche used to complain about her husband at the meetings and with me over the coffee counter where she worked. She worked part time in a donut shop and did all the housework plus took care of three kids. Her husband would tell her he was king in his house and what more could she possibly want anyway, and it was all that women's lib shit that was the problem. Blanche and her three kids ran away from home and stayed with different people in the group until they got enough money together to send her to California. I promised Blanche I'd visit her mother, who'd been living in a convalescents' home for the last thirty years. Blanche's father had died when she was a little girl and she had been raised in foster homes and institutions, the same as I was. We'd compare notes on foster homes and institutional food between California and Connecticut.

The convalescents' home was a rickety old building that sat behind an overgrowth of shrubs and trees. The floors dipped in places. There were several wards, a nurse's station which was never lit, a nurse at the station that was hard of hearing. Blanche's mother was at the end of a ward that hit me in the face with the strong smell of urine and feces from decaying bodies. I could hear moaning and groaning and see the exposed pipes and dirty raggedy curtains hanging on the windows.

Four old, old, old women shared the room with Blanche's mother. One cried out constantly, "Help me! Somebody help me!" And the nurses would prop her up in her wheelchair so's she couldn't reach down and play with herself. Blanche's mother was a crippled-up little thing in a hospital bed. She told me she had once been the principal of a school. There was a lady next to her who'd fallen out of bed a few days before. The whole right side of her body was black, and her eyes were red and sunk into her cheeks. Her skin was like paper on her brittle bones. She moaned and moaned; and her moaning turned to howling and crying, and then she reached through the bars on her bed and touched me! I pulled away, looking at her crumpled old fingers and into her fearing eyes, at her soft, toothless mouth shivering in panic. My heart pounded in my chest. She was barely alive, and I was afraid of death. There were so many people concealing lonely, desperate minds in withered helpless old bodies condemned to life.

I began freaking out. I felt trapped, so I began to drive, and I'd drive sometimes all night on the back roads of Connecticut. I'd go to the church on the corner and sit through funerals and weddings of people I didn't know. I'd call people and listen for them to say hello, and then hang up; I'd call and order stuff for people in their names and wonder vaguely what their reaction was when they received it. I sent obscene letters to congressmen and signed my work supervisor's name to them. I often took long walks around the neighborhood, wishing the United States would get out of California. No one walked in my neighborhood, day or night. I began to wonder if they knew something I didn't about walking; and I'd panic inside. Most of the rich, Wall Street pricks' lives were spent locked in houses with drawn curtains, or locked in their cars rushing to nowhere. I'd wake up at night and see Lester lying next to me. It was over, but he still came-Lester, Helda's husband, in the form of my own husband. I moved to another bedroom to avoid waking in the dead of night to feel Lester's nude body clinging, clinging to me. I never made love with Raman or any other man again because Lester would be in them, too, the same as he got into Raman's body. Helda, the woman whose body I came from, slept with Lester and didn't seem to mind. The hate I had for men became fear-all men were out to get me in one way or another. There were millions of men lurking in hallways waiting to grab me, tie me up and rape me and everyone in the world would shout in unison, "YOU KNOW YOU REALLY LIKED IT!"

A women's center was started nearby, somewhere, somehow. It was considered revolutionary because women would go hang out there instead of staying home or doing volunteer work somewhere else. I hung out there, too. I met Rose under the big silver cross, on the side of the building where the center was, on opening day. We smoked a couple of joints and waved to the passing cops, who thought we were probably church ladies. I always wanted to hang someone in the government on the big silver cross, but no one thought that was very funny.

When the next meeting was held at the center, several women "expressed concern" (that's what they called it) at the fact that some women were (gasp) smoking grass; and they knew who those women were!

That night I went with Rose to a gay bar, and after it closed we went back to the center and made love all over the very room the meeting had been held in a few hours before. Too bad no one was there to watch. Rose was so different from Dazie and Lily. But I had stopped looking for Dazie in other women by that time.

Rose-she was a beautiful woman who lived with a sister who owned cats. Even worse, she had two little kids, who-I'd swear to this day-were really midgets out to get me. The~r father lived down the street and came by occasionally to weep over the kids. I spent every available hour with Rose and, when I wasn't with her, I'd see her face everywhere. She was a probation officer before she got married, and I always thought it was so cool making it with a P.O.

I'd stop home briefly to babysit my children but Rose's midgets were always around and were becoming intolerable. We'd start to make love and the smallest prick would start crying from the other room. Rose'd jump up, and stick him in bed with us. Meanwhile, my daughter, who was used to sleeping with me, by that time would be up and crying for me at home; or so I was told.

Raman knew I was having an affair but it didn't come to a head until the ceiling was leaking from the bathtub overflow; so I'm still uncertain what he thought about it, or what the hell difference it made to him: I had become his dead wife, who'd occasionally haunt him when he least expected it. My little daughter sympathized with her father and would follow me around and criticize me and tell me she hated me; and I'd tell her I hated my mother, too, and it was healthy.

Every Friday night Rose and I would storm the gay bar in town with a gang from the center and drown ourselves in drink and dim lights and obnoxious music. In the darkness we could all fondle each other; and the drunker we got the easier it was to know that this was the only place in town we could be ourselves. Two women who hated women operated the place, and would pick our pockets and short change us if we weren't careful. We tried to overlook it.

I never told the women at work about my other friends. I didn't think nice girls, like I was trying to be, even knew about queers, let alone being one. If they knew I was a queer, they'd know I wasn't really like them. One of the nice women from work used to say, "Hey, let's go over to that bar where the queers dance with each other." She was a woman in her fifties and seemed to think it would be terribly amusing to watch the queers dance. So one night I said to her, "I'm bored; let's go on over there and watch the queers dance." Once we were in the bar I told her I was gay and that I came there all the time with my lover; and now that she had come with me everyone was going to call her queer, too. Well, do you know? she asked me to dance. She said that when you got to be her age you could be what you want. After that, she'd wink at me when I came into work.

A woman writer who had the self-imposed title of Lesbian-Feminist came to the center to speak. She talked about changing the world so that only lesbians would live in it and we would all be happy and strong together. By that time, there was a gang of women who'd crawled out of the closet. We were personal people, and the writer wanted to make us political. I liked the woman, and found her energetic, alive and magnetic. I followed her around and clung to her every word and movement. She tossed her opinions at us, and I listened like it was the word of god; and hoped Rose would continue to stay in the corner and pout (because that's what she was doing) so I could be free to try and seduce this woman. As it turned out, Rose slept with a woman from the gang and the writer ran off with a blond kid, and I went home alone.

The woman lived a life she never discussed the painful beginning of. I have since discovered that no one I have ever known has ever changed her life for political reasons-the political stance is the result of a change in the life.

Winter would come to New England like a reminder of death, stripping its trees bare, leaving an emptiness. Spring was a reincarnation of last year's summer. The seasons, especially winter, were always a dramatic experience for me. One winter morning I sat on my bed in the house alone and looked at my naked body in the mirror. I'd gained a lot of weight since moving to Connecticut. The body staring back at me wasn't the one I remembered from the years before: large hips, soft skin, bulges filled with fading freckles; large breasts sagging; the nipples stretching pink over blue milk veins that showed through the white like road maps. I have a round stomach with a hollow tunnel to my navel. I have red fuzzy pubic hair that does indeed match the hair on my head (people always ask me about that); my square face has small blue eyes. This is not the body I wanted. My eyes looked into the eyes of another woman who was not me, but who I was once a part of. Her round stomach, with the hollow tunnel to her navel, once protected and nourished me. Her large breasts sag from their own weight and have blue milk veins that show through the white like road maps. Her face is like my face-only older, but not much older. Her reddish-brown hair is fading and graying. The woman in the mirror started laughing; she threw her head back and roared, and I threw my head back and roared. She started weeping, and I began weeping. She put her head down and wept, and so did I-not because I wanted to laugh or weep, but because Helda, my reflection, wanted to be Helda who knew that this was not the body she wanted either.

Rose told me I was straight because I couldn't get my shit together to leave Raman and because I spent too much time helping other people get their shit together. She told me she could love me but that I wasn't capable of loving anyone. I had thought I loved her; but then I began hating her for all the women who'd harmed me in one way or another. I spent four years in Connecticut evening up the score: people who never really harmed me got it for those who had. Rose and I had been brought together by a gust of wind that passed on by and left us stranded. Sometime after spring, and before winter, when the leaves fell we separated as though it had never really happened. One morning I woke up bi-sexual; I bated women as much as I hated men.

Then the company asked Raman to move back to San Francisco. I decided to leave three months before Raman with our daughter. He would stay with our son until they were ready to leave, Leaving early would give me time to think. I really wanted to forget I was married, had children, was a lesbian; and I wanted to find out what I really was. One thing was certain: no one would ever talk me into moving somewhere I didn't want to go, or do what I didn't want to do ever again.

Dazie dropped by when I was packing and told me about the sugar daddy she'd latched on to, and how he paid for the silicone in her breasts, the caps on her teeth and the plastic surgery on her face. Sugar daddy had a wife but he only wanted her for business trips. I couldn't have cared less about seeing Dazie at that point, but I told her I was glad she was happy. That empty space she'd left inside me was sealed off now with resentment and anger -for her and others who I felt abandoned me.

One of the gang from the center took me and my daughter to the airport. My daughter still hated me.

Soon I'd see little houses nestled in the hills and would be back in San Francisco. I'd see faces of people I no longer knew; or maybe never knew, really. Familiar faces would be everywhere because everyone looked alike. I would be, once again, in another place-still out of place.

Once I found out I was going back to San Francisco I called Mrs. Turner. I was curled up in a corner of the couch, listening to the phone ring again and again. She was living with Helda.

"Hello," a man's voice said. *Lester*. My heart stopped. I slammed the phone down. I started rocking. It's too early to call. She's still up in her room. In a few hours she'll be downstairs fixing dinner. Then she'll go back to her room until everyone finishes eating, then back down again to wash the dishes. Mrs. Turner liked to eat alone.

I waited a few hours, trying to time it just right. I dialed the numbers slowly. Ring-ring-ring. If Helda answered, I'd talk to her for a few minutes then ask for Mrs. Turner. But Helda might tell me Mrs. Turner is busy and just keep talking.

"Hello."

"Hi! Hi, Grandma, it's me Linda!"

"Well, good gracious, girl! How are you? I just got your letter a few days ago. Is everything all right?"

"Oh yes, Grandma, I'm just fine-everyone is fine." I tried to sound as cheerful as I could so she wouldn't know I was lying. "I'm coming back to California-me and my little girl will come first, then Raman will come with our boy.

"Ain't that nice. I sure will be glad to see you. How's everything between you and, and, oh . . . what is his name?"

"Raman. That's the wonderful part of it, Grandma-he got a great promotion and lots of money, so we can buy a house then maybe you can come live with us." I lied, licking the tears from my mouth.

"What?" she joked. "So I can wash dishes for my grandchildren like I do for my daughters?"

"Now, you know that won't happen with me. Who knows, maybe in a few years I'll have a maid-maybe two-one for you and one for me."

"Ha ha ha, and I just might not live that long. Where're you gonna stay while you're waiting for that man to come?"

"I'll be staying with a friend in Marin county for a while." I answered, not lying. We talked a little more. I promised I would call her as soon as I got settled. I told a few more lies before saying goodbye.

The damn pipes started banging. It was dark but I couldn't seem to move to turn the light on. I sat up and started rocking; just rocking, rocking, rocking.

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REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE JUVENILE COURT OF ALAMEDA COUNTY

April, 1959

CONCERNING: LINDA DOE

MOTHER: Helda Crude: Sporadic babysitter and housewife. She reports part-time babysitting at \$.50 an hour, earning approximately \$10.00 per month.

PRESENT SITUATION: On May 27, 1958, Linda was placed in the licensed and approved foster home of Mrs. Stella Joneman in Pleasanton, California. During the past six months, Linda has continued to make a tenuous adjustment in her foster home. The foster mother reports that more recently the girl has been more responsive and seems to be making a better adjustment. As previously reported to the Court, Linda is a fifteen-year-old girl of low average intelligence who has been functioning below this level because of emotional difficulties and retarded academic skills. The girl's adjustment has been hindered by the fact that she is a highly isolated and alienated person who suffers from a paucity of meaningful interpersonal relationships. It appears that her identifications continue to be confused and she remains in much conflict regarding her own role and position in the world in which she lives.

FINANCES: Request for Aid to Needy Children funds for Linda's support has been denied because of the mother's excess of -personal property. Inasmuch as the mother has recently reported that she is babysitting for a neighbor for \$.50 an hour and earning approximately \$10 a month, \$5 monthly reimbursement from her is for Linda's care.

PROBATION OFFICER'S REPORT: Lester Crude.

THE Vicum: Linda Doe, aged thirteen, is the illegitimate daughter of the defendant's wife. The father is one John Doe. Linda resulted from a casual act in an automobile. She has lived with this defendant and her motl-er since the age of two, except for a brief period wherein she was removed from the home because of her mother's "neglect and unfitness." At the age of ten, Linda fell from a tree and seriously injured her hip. This required hospitalization, surgery, and therapeutic treatment. Linda is now on crutches as a result of a weakened femur.

The girl is a stocky individual and has red hair and freckles. Her disability has resulted not only in physical handicap but also in certain social isolation and deprivation of normal social stimulation from school and other children. At the time of the defendant's arrest for the current offense, Linda was in the seventh grade at a local Catholic school. She has been removed from her home and made a ward of the juvenile Court. At present, Linda is i~ a Catholic institution in San Francisco.

DEFENDANT'S STATEMENT: "My offense concerns violations of sec. 288 of the Penal Code. Some two and a half to three years ago I started playing with the sex organs of my step-daughter, Linda. These actions at first consisted of caressing her private parts. At that time she had no breast development.

"In June of 1954, Linda fell from a tree and fractured the neck of the femur of the left leg. She was put into a body cast with a brace between her legs, at the knee, to hold the legs apart. Needless to say, at this time I discontinued 'bothering' her. The task of caring for her, particularly turning her over, because it was too much for my wife, fell to me. After about five to six months in the cast, Linda began to develop physically-pubic hair started to appear and her breasts enlarged. But then, I did not touch these parts.

"With the removal of the cast, Linda was put on crutches and I again began caressing her sex organs,

adding the breasts. This continued for several months. In February of this year Linda was hospitalized for an operation on her leg. Upon her return home she was again on crutches.

"For a period of two or three months I did not touch her, but I started again about three months ago.

"What was done during this time consisted primarily of what I have stated above. In addition, I, on occasion, perhaps a half dozen times, kissed her private parts. I also persuaded her to kiss my penis a few times. At no time did I have sexual intercourse with her. Nor did I force myself on her; her participation in these acts seemed to be willing.

I have stated to the police that I experienced an orgasm on about 4 occasions during this period, or these three periods. This is true.

"Specifically, the charges against me concern the 11th, 12th, and 13th of August. All counts were identical except for the dates. These charges me with certain actions for the gratification of my passions. Technically, the charges are true. However, there was no exciting of my passions on these occasions on none of these dates did I even get an erection.

"A little background about the August situation is here necessary. My wife left Friday evening, August 10th, for Los Angeles. I took the children to their aunt's in Hayward. Linda returned to the house with me. These arrangements were made for two reasons-I am very difficult to arouse in the morning and, more important, Linda needed certain therapy exercises.

"Linda spent the day, Saturday, with a girlfriend. She was home when I arrived from work that evening. I prepared and served dinner. Linda cleaned up at approximately nine o'clock and told me she was going to bed. I said I would be right up. She lay on her bed while I gave the exercises. She was wearing tight-fitting pedal pushers; she was fully clothed. The last of these exercises consisted of her lying on her back and spreading her legs as widely as possible a number of times. During this exercise, and this exercise only, I put my right hand over her private parts on top of her pedal pushers. With my left hand I touched her breast. At the end of the exercise I again went downstairs.

"On Sunday we spent the day at Lakeside Park, at the exhibition of the East Bay Collectors' Club, of which I am sales manager. I got there at eight o'clock, Linda arrived about ten, after church.

After the show and after the equipment had been stored, Linda and I stopped at the Imperial Fountain on Lakeshore for dinner, arriving at about nine o'clock. We got home at nearly ten. I followed her to her room. She told me she was too tired for the exercises tonight. I agreed, and left. A half hour or so later, Mrs. Crude telephoned from San Diego and told me she would not be in Monday evening as planned.

-So far as my actions with Linda are concerned, Monday was a repetition of Saturday."

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION FOR LESTER CRUDE: Violation of Section 288 of the Penal Code of the State of California, in that said defendant willfully and lewdly committed a lewd and lascivious act upon and with the body and certain parts and members thereof of Linda Doe, a child under the age of fourteen years, with the intent of arousing, appealing to and gratifying the lust, passion and sexual desires of the said defendant.

FOR THE PEOPLE: Mr. Stanley

FOR THE DEFENDANT: Mr. Clark

THE CLERK: People versus Lester Crude for preliminary examination.

MR. CLARK: If your Honor please, this gentleman has indicated to me that he wants to at this time indicate his desire to plead guilty when he reaches the Superior Court to one count of the information and I understand the District Attorney at this time would like to have him take the stand.

MR. STANLEY: It is my understanding that he desires to waive preliminary as to one count and is willing to take the witness stand and be sworn and admit here for the record the elements of the offense. Is that correct, Mr. Crude?

THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

MR. STANLEY: That will be agreeable to the People, your Honor. Mr. Crude, would you step up there and be sworn, please.

The defendant, called as a witness on behalf of the People, being first duly sworn, testified as follows:

MR. STANLEY: You are the defendant in this action?

MR. CRUDE: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Now you are charged in the complaint on file in this case with three counts of violation of Section 288 of the Penal code. As to count one it alleges that on or about the 11th of August 1956 you willfully and unlawfully committed lewd and lascivious acts upon the body and members thereof of one Linda Doe, a child under the age of fourteen years, with the intent of arousing, appealing to and gratifying the lust, passion and sexual desires of you, the defendant. Now, that is true, isn't it?

ANSWER: The last part I can't say is true.

Q: Well, let me ask you this: Linda Doe is your step-daughter?

A: Right.

Q: She is twelve years old, isn't she?

A: Yes.

Q: She will be thirteen in October?

A: Right, sir.

Q: She was living with you and the other members of your family and her mother during the early part of August of this year?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: On the weekend of August 11th, Mrs. Crude was away, wasn't she?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: She went out of town?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: She was gone for three or four days?

A: That is right.

Q: The other children were staying with someone else?

A: That is right.

Q: And you and Linda were at home alone during that weekend, is that right?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And on the 11th of August while the two of you were in the home there together you placed your hands up on, and fondled her private parts?

A: Right.

Q: And you kissed her private parts?

A: No, sir.

Q: Not on that day?

A: No, sir.

Q: You fondled her breasts?

A: Yes sir.

Q: And this was in the evening, was it?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And in what part of the house were you on that particular occasion?

A: We were upstairs.

Q: Were you in a bedroom?

A: In her bedroom, yes.

Q: Was she in the bed at the time?

A: No, sir.

Q: Was she fully clothed?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: And were you at that time fully clothed?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You placed your hands under her clothing and fondled her privates?

A: No, sir, not under her clothes.

Q: You have on other occasions?

A: I have.

Q: Now, as to count one of this complaint, when you go down to the Superior Court-and an information is filed down there charging you with a violation of Section 288 as set forth in count one of this complaint-it is your intention to enter a plea of guilty, is that right?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You are guilty of that offense?

A: Not ...

Q: Well, you are guilty of that offense, aren't you, Mr. Crude?

A: Yes, I am.

MR. STANLEY: All right, that is all. If the Court please, the defendant may be discharged as to counts two and three in view of his testimony and waiver of further evidence. We will ask that he be held to answer as to count number one.

THE COURT: That may be the order.

MR. CLARK: In that connection, if your Honor please, there was a motion before the court for reduction of bail. Of course, with the dismissal of the two counts I suppose the reduction would be automatic. I am informed that the defendant can raise the sum of \$2500. 00 in cash and in view of the fact that he has a family of small children that urgently need his support, I am endeavoring to try to save him the expense of a premium payment on a larger bond. In other words, if the order were for five thousand dollars he would have no alternative but to get a bail bond with a premium which would be \$500.00, which would handicap his family; but he is informed that his boss would put up cash bail in the sum \$2500. 00, which I am sure would ...

THE COURT. Do you own your home?

THE DEFENDANT: I am buying my home.

THE COURT: How long have you lived there?

THE DEFENDANT: I've lived in this area since 1915.

THE COURT: And where do you work?

THE DEFENDANT: A grocery in Berkeley.

THE COURT: How long have you worked with them?

THE DEFENDANT: Since 1940.

THE COURT: Do you own any other property?

THE DEFENDANT: No, I don't.

THE COURT: Is the house in your name? THE DEFENDANT: And my wife's name.

THE COURT: The two of you together?

THE DEFENDANT: Yes, sir.

THE COURT: Counts two and three of the complaint may be discharged on motion of the District Attorney. It appearing to me that a felony-to wit: a violation of Section 288 of the Penal Code-has been committed and there is sufficient cause to believe the withinnamed defendant, Lester Crude, guilty thereof, I order that he be held to answer to the Superior Court of Alameda County to the Sheriff of said Alameda County, and that he be admitted to bail in the sum of \$2500.00 and he is committed to the Sheriff of the County of Alameda until he gives such bail.

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A COPY OF A PSYCHIATRIC REPORT:

Dear judge Mahon:

Pursuant to your request, I examined Lester Crude in my office, Sept. 20th, the purpose being to determine whether or not he is a Sexual Psychopath. The defendant states that he is accused of an offense against his stepdaughter, that of touching her genitalia on several occasions. He states that this step-daughter, who is now thirteen, fractured her leg some two and a half years ago and since then had required physiotherapy treatments. He has participated in these treatments in order to provide help to the girl in the re-education of the involved muscles. He admits that on several occasions, during this period of time, he had touched her genitals and this action appears to have been received by the girl without protest. In fact, he states that at no time was there any penetration of the vagina, and never at any time was there any thought of intercourse. The present offense appears to relate to one such occasion on Aug. 11th of this year, although he admits that on some of these occasions the girl seemed interested in manipulating his penis, which however, never resulted in an ejaculation.

The defendant was married twice before this present marriage, both previous marriages having ended in divorce. He has been married to his present wife since 1944, and states that the relationship has been happy. His wife has two children from a former marriage. The defendant and his wife have three children of their own. It seems that the sexual relationship has been entirely harmonious and happy, although he does not regard himself as highly sexed.

The defendant is forty-eight years old at the present time, and has completed high school. From the vocational standpoint, he has worked on a newspaper, and in several brokerage offices. Since 1932, he has been in the grocery business and for some years he has been, apparently, a valued employee in the capacity of buyer and pricer.

The medical history reveals that he has had nothing particularly serious, although he was rejected for the service because of a ruptured ear drum. As a result of this he has no service record and spent some three years at the shipyards during WWII. He has no prior criminal record. In the evaluation of this man's problem, there appears to be no present evidence of any nervous or mental disorder. He is certainly not psychotic and he does not appear to be the victim of a psychoneurotic type personality. I do not believe that he should be considered a sexual psychopath and I feel "that the present offense can be explained on the basis of an accidental association with the girl in question whose behavior and medical needs have presented the temptation to the type of behavior indicated above. This behavior is, of course, extremely ill-advised and indicative, of course, of impaired judgment, but I do not consider it in the light of a sexual deviation. In the light of the above, it is my opinion that he is not a Sexual Psychopath, and further, that the type of behavior herein is not at all likely to be repeated and consequently I feel that he is a reasonably good risk for probation.

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PROBATION OFFICER's REPORT: Lester Crude.

Conditions for Probation:

1.The first year of the probationary period will be spent in the County jail, and while in the County jail the defendant will be entitled to the same credits for good behavior as provided in the Penal Code for other prisoners.

2.The defendant will be of good conduct throughout the probationary period. He will obey all statutes, laws and ordinances, and carry out any suggestions made in connection with his conduct by the probation officer.

3.The defendant will not live in the same household with minor children during the probationary period.

4.The defendant will stay away from parks, playgrounds, school yards and other places where small children gather and play. He will not attend matinee performances of moving pictures.

5.The defendant will report to the probation officer at regular intervals of at least once each month. The defendant is remanded to custody.

The doctor's reports and the probation officer's report will be filed.

PROBATION OFFICER's REPORT: Lester Crude.

EVALUATION: This defendant is a quiet individual with a high-school education and better-than-average intelligence. During interview, he was cooperative on the surface and made no effort to deny his acts. He did, however, attempt to minimize his participation and the serious nature of his conduct. He also stressed the fact that the victim was acquiescent.

It is believed that the defendant is completely unmoved by thoughts regarding Linda's future and the probability that he has marked the girl, mentally, for life. That the defendant lacks sensitivity is apparent from his known awareness of conditions which existed in his own home and his failure to make any effort to remedy them. Thus the defendant knew that his conduct with Linda made her life unbearable in the home with Mrs. Crude. He knew Mrs. Crude was jealous of Linda. He knew that Joe Stites was molesting the little girl, his own daughter. These matters caused the defendant little or no concern. His, in his own words, was a happy household, his wife loved him deeply and he loved his wife.

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST's REPORT: Helda Crude.

Helda Crude's present marriage was made in Alameda in 1944. Both Helda and her husband, Lester Crude, were at that time working in a shipyard. Previously, Helda had an illegitimate daughter by a casual contact which appears to have taken place in an automobile. According to early records, Helda was known to the juvenile Probation Office as a delinquent girl with a history of sexual promiscuity. After her marriage to this defendant, Helda again came to the attention of juvenile Court because of her general neglect and mistreatment of her two small children. At that time the children were removed from their home because of Helda's unfitness to care for them. The children were subsequently returned to the defendant's home.

The referring deputy asks what Mrs. Crude's scale of values is; that is, her attitude towards attachment to husband and appreciation of financial security derived through him versus any sound moral obligations she might maintain toward her children. Mrs. Crude understands most of the rules and standards of society. She does not, however, always apply them to herself. She is in great fear regarding the disposition of her husband's case in that she needs to have a husband not only for financial support and sexual gratification but also because this is the socially accepted relationship to have. She is aware of being far more concerned about what this means to her, her relationship, her pleasures and her future life than she is about the effects upon Linda and what meaning this has to the child.

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'This stool is uncomfortable. I should've got the one Leona has 'cause my ass is bigger than hers. There's a spider . . . III wait till it gets to the floor, then I'll kill it. I didn't. So how come I gotta be in penance? I didn't write, I LOVE YOU, LINDA DOE on the bathroom wall, and neither did Leona. Well, Mother can just go ahead and keep me in isolation 'cause I'm not gonna write nothing on this paper except what I want to.... There, I just drew a picture of a little girl with braids and buck teeth. give it to Leona so she can laugh. III push it with my foot to her. She's laughing. The paper doesn't make a noise. I don't know why I'm afraid it will. I squished the spider, and it looks like the ink blot the shrink showed me, I told him, It looks like an ink blot. He raised his eyebrows and coughed. I wonder what he thought it looked like. Sharon is really going to get her ass in trouble. Mother said if she doesn't shape up they're gonna send her to that place the really bad girls go. The aide said that they put you in a strait jacket if you don't mind; and if you don't have a tattoo nobody will like you. I don't have a tattoo and nobody likes me already. Somebody likes me-Leona just sent me a picture of two girls with freckles and pigtails and one of them has slant eyes. French bread is stuck in my taste buds. I'm never going to be able to taste anything again. I can hear motorcycles outside. Rita says her brothers drive by all the time out there on their motorcycles. Shit. Everybody's stinking like that perfume they gave us for Christmas, I traded mine for a candy bar. I wonder if I'm going to stay here for the rest of my life. Keep this in my shoe, nobody will find it. There's some snails on Mother's favorite plant. Good, I hope they eat it right up. A cat is sitting on the windowsill looking at me. Oh, no. Sharon is trying to climb the fence. Rita's helping her. They've both got fat since they got here. Sodi I wonder why Leona didn't get fat. Mother says we're real lucky, having so much food and all. She says we should play more in the yard when we go there. How can we, when it's so small and empty? Only thing to do is swing. I get sick when I swing. Maybe I'm not supposed to swing anymore, now that I'm fourteen. I wish I had some custard pie. At juvie we got custard pie ... it feels good in my mouth, especially when it's real warm. I wonder how they're gonna get over the barbed wire? Rita's waving, but I can't wave back or they'll get caught ... A shit, the wind's blowing and all those long trees on the other side of the fence are getting tangled together. It's getting dark and foggy. There's a siren, but far away, If I'm gonna have to sit here for the rest of my life, I might as well do what I want to. Rita is brave because she's got four big sisters and two big brothers who taught her how to be brave. She told me that someday, when I get on the outside, I could come to her house on 15th Street and she would show me her switchblade and brass knuckles. They really belong to her sister. She already showed me how to tease my hair way up high so I can hide razor blades in it. That's so when the cops grab you by the hair they get their hands cut up. I'm never gonna tell Leona this, but I'm scared to run away. Mother's

always telling us about those girls that get caught and how they can never come back, not even to visit. Betteann came back to visit, but Mother wouldn't let her back in because she swore and wore too much makeup. Even though I don't like Mother, I don't like Betteann either. The Mother that's coming to stay with us tonight lets us listen to anything we want on the radio. She'll want to know why I'm in penance, then she'll rub my forehead. She always does that. I like her, she's nice. I wonder how Rita and Sharon got outside? Probably they hid under the arch near St. Theresa's statue. Yep, I bet that's what they did while we were waiting for the aide to find her key. I'm afraid to run away ... someone will hurt me. How would I eat? where would I hide? where would I sleep? Mother says that if we run away nobody will take us in but criminals and then we'll be just like them. I'm scared to stay here because I can never do the right thing. I don't want to go home. I don't want to go to no dumb foster home. Betteann said foster homes do it for the money. Those people who take kids don't want us, and we don't want them, so there. Father told me at confession that I couldn't hate Lester or even wish he was dead. That's a sin, I said, When will fathers stop sinning? I wish -I was dead, shit, how'd that fat old Sharon do it? I mean, she got over all them thorns. I got a pimple on my shoulder. I popped it because I like to watch the pus come out. I like to pick my nose, too, but everybody gets mad, especially when I eat it. I saw Mother pick her nose and eat it with my own eyes. I wanted to say, Get your fingers out of your own nose! I wonder why picking your nose is nasty, and no one talks about it. The reason picking pimples isn't nasty is because they're outside, not inside. Nobody can call what's outside nasty. That white stuff that gets on my pants is nasty. I put it on the wall in the bathroom. Somebody else puts hers on the wall, too. Probably the fink. God, I hope nobody ever reads this, or I'll really be in trouble. Rita says she knew Cobra on the outside. Cobra and her sister were in a gang. When Rita and Cobra get together they talk real fast in Spanish. Rita's not supposed to talk Spanish, and Mother gets mad if she tries to teach it to us. A lot of people on the outside talk Spanish. Oh no. That new aide is here, snooping around... Wow, that was close. I almost got caught. Mother screamed at me but I had you hid in my bra. Mother said I couldn't look out the window. When I did look out, Rita and Sharon were gone. After a little while, I heard the sound of motorcycles. Mother says she's gonna get rid of her old aide. I heard her say that to another Mother. That's good news to the new aide. I wonder why she wants to work here. She says she likes to hear everybody's problems. Well, I'm never gonna tell her mine, nosy old bag. They didn't catch Rita and Sharon, though, else Mother would've been bragging about how the cops had handcuffed them. Mother's just walking around mad, like when her cat disappeared last week. Last week I had to clean the bathroom, this week I have to dust. When I cleaned the chapel with Beaver, we had a fight. I punched her good, boy. Mother came and broke it up. She said we couldn't scream and fight in the chapel. Shit, we can't do that anywhere. I want to scream and beat somebody up. Someone is knocking on the door. . . . That nun is here that lets us listen to rock and roll. Elvis is singing "Heartbreak Hotel" and the girls are screaming and swaying. I want to dance, too, but I don't want to make an ass out of myself. I got sick and threw up on the playground today. Leona says it's because I was swinging while I had my period. She's just mad because she didn't start her period yet, and I'm younger than she is. That new aide asked me why I'd been sent here. I told her it was because I had a switchblade after curfew. She asked me if I liked my mother. I said my mother was a secretary and real nice and my father was a sergeant in the Navy. She asked me if I daydreamed a lot. Ever since they gave Peanut that shot, she just sits and daydreams all the time. We can hardly talk to her. The nurse in the clinic said it would make Peanut feel better. Peanut jumped around a lot before she got the shot and I liked her that way. I heard Mother tell that new aide that they're just waiting to stick Peanut into some asylum. Oh,

wow, that's my favorite song. I found my thrill on blueberry hill.... Leona is pretending she's Fats Domino. She's got that broom with the long brush stuck between her legs. Everyone's laughing. Mother came back and turned the radio off. Leona has to sit in penance. Mother keeps giving me funny looks. I told her I was doing my English homework. **If I'm real quiet**, she won't bother me. That Indian girl is scratching her arm again. She told me she was gonna break out of here. She doesn't want to go back to the reservation, though. She wants to go live with Elvis Presley. I'm still waiting for something, but I don't know what I'm waitingfor. Everything looks all gray, maybe because it's raining outside. I asked Motherjeroldfor her autograph today. She wrote her initials on a holy card. I'm going to save all my holy cards, even after I get out of here, We're going to the beauty parlor.... Leona's washing her hair now, while Idrymine. The dryerfeels good. Motherjust told the aide that Sharon and Rita won't get far. Rita told me a long time ago that she was going to her boyfriend's house in San Jose. She said nobody would find her there. Somebody else broke out, but I think they found her. When I get out of here I'm gonna join a gang and put a tattoo on my ankle. Leona says we can run away together. She knows how to live on the outside. We can hide in the hills behind the convent. Blondie started a fight with Tish. Blondie lied and blamed it all on Tish. When we were in the laundry room, Blondie stood at the window and opened her blouse and showed her tits to the garbage men. Leona and me saw her and we never told nobody, Mother's yelling at Tish. I get scared when Mother yells like that. Tish is on the floor screaming and kicking the chairs. Those two kiss-asses are taking her to isolation. I hate Blondie. When I pray, I don't think about god. I think about how I'm one of those rich ladies that came to watch us in the playground. But they didn't talk to us because they're rich, When I pray, I'm the one they like the best and then they take me with them and they think I'm cute and they give me whatever I want. I wonder where the rich ladies went, I think I have to tell Father because it's a sin to think about something else when you're supposed to be praying. Igot a D in math. I always get a D or an F in math. I said shit to my math teacher and she said, You wouldn't be saying that word so fluently if you had a mouth full of it. Then she sent me to the principal. The priest told us we should eat all our food and be thankfulfor it because there are many poor people in India. He knows, because he was there. The Indian kids sleep on the sidewalks and beg. I got a C in religion. My teacher said I don't pay attention. How can I, when Cobra's there? I pay attention to Cobra, and sometimes, she pays attention to me ... but not all the time. I heard the dogs barking last night. Maybe thatgirl got caught. I wonder if the dogs eat you if they catch you. I don't want to go to a worse place. I hope they don't send me where they're mean. I poured salt in the new aide's coffee. She drank it and made all kinds offaces. She said, I wish these people would make some decent coffee. I said, Yep, and thefood's awful too. Me and Leona had to clean the arcade on our hands and knees. Mother said we lied, but we didn't. She said she knew who'd broken the Little Infant of Prague statue. Then she said Leona and I'd done it. But I never did hurt that little statue. I like that baby Jesus statue. Mother hollered until I thought the building would cave in on us. I like it when Leona lies in bed next to me, but Mother would really scream if she caught us hugging. I burned a candle for baby Jesus yesterday. Cobra was smoking in the bathroom-I could smell it on he rclothes. I wish Icould smoke with her. That new girl has only one arm. She said her other arm was run over on the railroad track. We all told her it looked ugly. She said she knew it looked ugly, and cried I hate people who cry. It's so stupid. Cobra gave me a piece of gum she'dbeen chewing. I'm saving it with my holy cards. I almost got in a fight in the dorm last night. This girl pushed me when I was sound asleep and said Id been moving the bed all over the place and keeping her awake. Shit, I almost kicked her ass. She thinks she's so boss. Soon as she saw how pissed I was she said she was real sorry. The

host stuck to my mouth at mass today and I almost choked Mother says the priest can touch the body of god because two of his fingers are blessed But ladies can't touch, The nurse said I shouldn't eat my fingernails but she didn't say why. The doctor put a stick up my vagina. He put a stick up everybody's, and this was the fourth time. I don't know why, though. I hate it when he feels my tits. Star said she had to take a douche. She said she stuck this rubber tube up her and a bunch of water gushed out.... I'm sitting under the table in the dining room. Mother got mad at me because I was feeling myself. I was not feeling myself, and I swear it to God. I was scratching. I'm all by myself, and the door is locked I don't know how long I'll have to stay here. If an earthquake comes, though-, I won't get hurt. The ceiling will hit the table, not me. That new aide and some Mother just came in: Hello, Linda. 171 bet you could talk if you really wanted to, Linda. The new aide stood way back from me, like I was poison and said I had all kinds of emotional problems. I wished there'd been an earthquake right then. They would have been crushed, but not me. They left, and locked me back in. The senior girls are on the other side of this wall. I can hear them, my ear's against the wall. shit, man, wow, boss, scarf up, hum hum, hey girl, don't fuck around with me, ha ha ha ha crash bang crash ... sounds like they're washing dishes. I got a D in English. My teacher says I don't pay attention. Her vagina stinks, I can smell it all the way across the room. Mother says her husband died in the war. She made me write on the board in front of everybody, and the chalk broke, Then she got mad because I drew the "S" backwards. I wish I was smart, then I wouldn't have to study. God, there's sure a lot of gum stuck under this table. Nobody's supposed to chew gum, bubble gum especially. But I know for a fact that that's bubble gum there, and there, and there. I'm scared because it's dark and the senior girls have gone. I'll sing to the holy mother... On-n this day, ohh beyeuteeful mooother! Ahhvay Mareeah! Mother's calling me so I have to put you in my shoe.... Elvis Presley was on Ed Sullivan last night and they didn't show his hips. Mother made us put our legs together and fold our hands in our laps while we watched. We couldn't even hum. Peanut swallowed a needle in sewing class and they had to take her to the hospital, I got a D in sewing. There's a brain in a bottle on the shelf. The sewing teacher says it's a monkey's brain. A big picture of Ike is on the wall over the monkey's brain. Ike smiles, and he's bald. I hope it really is a monkey's brain. I bet Peanut swallowed the needle on purpose just to see what it would be like. I can't swim today because I'm on my period Betteann says that in high school you gotta take your clothes off in front of everybody. I'm never going to high school. At least, here, we get in trouble if we undress in front of other people. We each have our own stalls, so no one sees us naked. Leona can swim real good. Mother's tired of watching everybody swim, so we have to go in now. Blondie's kotex fell out of her pants in front of everybody, and it was all bloody. Everybody saw. I got a pimple on my chin, but I'm waiting for it to get bigger before I pop it. I wonder who that Santa Claus was this year ... last year it was a senior girl and we pulled half her uniform off her. I got grouchy at Christmas. Most everybody else went home, but I'm glad I didn't. But it was gloomy here, Leona sat in a corner and wouldn't talk to anyone. I got two puzzles, a hottle of perfume, a paint-by-number set, a stuffed animal, nail polish and candy-and so did everybody else.... I was sitting in a swing to write, but somebody got mad because I wasn't swinging so now I'm sitting on the hench. We saw this movie a few Sundays ago. That sexy lady was in it. Mother made us leave because, she said, it was disgusting. just between you and me, I look just like that lady. I took my clothes off in front of the bathroom mirror and saw that I did. I wiggled and breathed funny, and it felt real good in the same part Of my stomach that sometimes feels bad. Leona says I'm a good looking chick, and so does Cobra. I het I could be a movie star if I weren't so scared of people. My tits are round and pretty and feel good. I'm not going to bite my nails anymore,

and I'm going to lose weight so I can have a skinny body with big tits on it. Mother says some rich ladies took the seniorgirls out and they got lost on Market Street, so now the cops are looking for them. The rich ladies said, Never again. They were at some movie, some senior girl yelled out that she didn't like that movie, so she split down Market and lifted all kinds of things from stores; and all the others ran with her. The senior girls' Mother was laughing about it-our Mother was disgusted. When we get to the movie place, we sit in front and the seniors sit in back. We aren't supposed to turn around and look, but sometimes I sneak a look and there that senior Mother is laughing and loving with all the girls. I wish she was ours. Those girls prop their feet up on the seats in front of them and pop gum and listen to transistor radios. Turn around, said Mother. Mother made me write, I must not turn around in the movie.... I told all the juniors in my health class to drop their pencils at exactly ten o'clock, so they did But the fink finked. I'm gonna kick that girl's ass so hard she'll never walk again. The health teacher said she liked me, so I took her a flower that I stole from a vase in the hallway. She winked, and said thank you. And that place in my stomach felt good Then I hid her eraser. I put it in the fink's desk, and the fink cried. That teacher smells good She knew I was the one who'd hidden the **eraser**, but all she did was tell me to be a good girl. She is the nicest Mother of all. She won't sign my holy card though. I gave her a holy card that said, To the nicest Mother of all... I heard the nurse's aide talking to herself and giggling. I hate her. She talks to me like she's smart or something. Linda, she says, you know you're supposed to ask if you want something, not just walk in and take it. Then she smiles this phony smile. Her front tooth has a great big chip in it. I love real cold milk and I hope we have it for dinner... That old Mother who comes to visit some times said we're real lucky because in the old days the girls used to have to sew all the time and wear dumb looking uniforms. Well, there's nothing to do anyway so we might as well be sewing; and I only have a few clothes anyway so I might as well wear a uniform. Leona is stabbing bugs with her pencil. She likes to do that... I wonder, when I get married, if I'll have to stick my husband's penis in my mouth. I don't want to. I 'm not going to get married. Leona wants to shave her legs. I have as much hair as she does, but it's lighter. Mother wants us to walk around, not stand in little clumps in the yard. If I don't bite my nails for two months, they'll get long. The new girl has only one arm but she has long eyelashes. Mother hates her. I told her I'd like her if she **wouldn't cry**, but I hate crybabies, The dog has a penis. It's pink and hangs out. Leona is playing with the dog's pink penis. Mother's face is all red, and she's screaming at Leona. Mother put the dog inside. We have to go inside-but a different inside from the dog's.... That senior girl I can't talk to told me that her uncle's best friend's cousin is a cop and that he said nuns run away and the cops have to pick them up. Maybe that's what happened to that nice Mother who taught us singing. The nurse said I have to wear glasses. I'm not going to. The singing Mother gave me candy and said I was a nice girl, Some lady came to our cottage and told us how to put makeup on and told us not to chew gum. Her face was too big for her nose. She told Mother I wouldn't answer when she asked me a question. Mother yelled, so I had to answer. I don't want to have to put makeup on like some old lady. When I get out, I'm going to join a gang and we'll make up the way we want to. All the other kids will want to be just like us. I don't want to go to a foster home. Some girl from here went to a foster home and had to babysit with a bunch of little kids all the time. All kinds of horns are honking outside. Maybe somebody got married. There aren't any trees in the yard, but there're lots of trees on the outside. Nuns don't have any other clothes and their heads are shaved-so how can they run away? We tell them that we hate it here. But god won't let them say that they're unhappy, That's who they married god I don't want to get married and suck a man's penis. I don't want to shave my head, I want to live in a gang. Some people came to teach us folk

dancing. I brought my crutch along and told them I was a cripple so I wouldn't have to dance those dumb dances. The lady who played the fiddle's slip was showing. The lady who called the dances got upset when Mother left her alone with us. Her voice got shaky, and she kept saying, Why, you're really very nice girls, aren't you? Why, you're no different from the girls in other schools, are you? The other girls and I just sat there and didn't even answer the stupid broad, but then Mother came back and yelled at us, I wonder where those broads went when they left here. Mother said they won't ever come back, thanks to us. Well, good... Mother Joseph said she didn't ever want to leave the convent, and how dare I ask. Pieces of her hair were sticking out from under her habit, but I didn't say anything. I never saw the Mothers' underwear. We can't go in that part of the laundry room.... When I close my eyes real tight, Cobra and I are cowgirls riding horses and making loops with our ropes. A new Mother from Ireland came and talked to us. She said to me, I bet you're Irish.... I can taste cod liver oil in my mouth. In Juvie, we had to eat a spoonful of cod liver oil every day with a piece of orange. I don't know why I can still taste it now. The pie at dinner was all mouldy, so nobody ate it. Mother didn't get mad at us, but we heard her yelling in the kitchen on the other side of the wall. I hope I don't have that dream again where some guy crawls in the window and kidnaps me and then throws me off the roof, and I keep falling and falling, I like that new song we learned in chapel about baby Jesus. Some rich ladies came and were looking at the old sewing room where those girls sewed all the time. They looked at me and smiled. I got scared because I was alone. I split. If they liked me, maybe they would take me with them. But would they watch me take my clothes off? They wouldn't like these clothes, We had Christmas in Magdalene Hall. Mary Magdalene's picture looks like the Virgin Mary's. The seniors broke a bunch of windows there when they had a riot. I wish I'd been there then.... Shit, I'm in penance again. Itoldyou not to rock, Linda Doe! Mother yelled. But I had to go to the bathroom, goddamn it. Then I held my mouth and my legs tight together. We can't go to the bathroom without asking Mother first, 'and I couldn't wait. Mother looked like she was going to slap me.... Somebody on t. v. is playing a banjo. Mother just yelled at me for tapping my foot. I wish I could turn around The girls behind me are yelling and clapping. Mother is calling them nothing but a bunch of okies. If I had a harmonica, I 'd sit on the roof and play it, and someone else could play a banjo if they wanted to. I want to move my body. Mother, I guess, isn't an okie.... I fell on the ground and kicked and screamed. But somebody else was in isolation, so I didn't have to go. And the nurse wasn't there so I didn't have to get a shot. I couldn't stop yelling and kicking, and I didn't want to. Someone is yodeling on t. v. I could be yodeling on the roof. Mother changed the station. I slept in the hallway. I banged my head and rocked and kicked, then I slept. I heard Leona call me. I'm praying for you, Linda, she called I love Leona. I'm afraid to leave Leona. Our gang is going to play lots of music on the roof when we bust out of here....