

LESBIAN WORDS

A SANTA CRUZ ANTHOLOGY



Edited by
Irene Reti & Sue McCabe

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Deborah Abbott

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Cynthia Gray

Cally Haber

April Kane

Rita Long

Sue McCabe

C. K. Morrison

Patty Paludan

Edith Peck

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Alene Smith

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If you would like to respond to this book or order extra copies, write:

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Introduction

This is a book about lesbian reality as seen through lesbian words. Many of us crave lesbian literature and poetry so much that we will devour almost any book with a lesbian character in it, no matter what its quality. This craving is more than a simple desire for something interesting or entertaining to read; it is a hunger for lesbian reality itself. We long to open a book and enter worlds in which lesbians exist.

While several fine anthologies of Santa Cruz women's poetry have been published, there is no local book specifically dedicated to lesbian poetry and prose. While *Lesbian Words* reflects the lives of (mostly white) American lesbians in one semi-rural, small city, and not the full global spectrum of lesbian experience, it still speaks truth about our lives. This book was conceived in love and appreciation for the creative voices of the lesbian writers who live in the Santa Cruz area, intended to give at least some of them a place to share their words.

Here are love poems. Here are reflections on friendship, loneliness, body image. We write about our work, our art, our politics. We write about the pain and joy we experience when we come out — to ourselves, our friends, our parents. We face homophobia, sexism, sexual violence, racism and anti-Semitism; our writing speaks of this. Our words describe job hunting, raising children, communicating with our mothers and fathers. In stories and poems we explore our sexuality, nature, and nuclear war. We write about our lives.

This book is dedicated to our words, to lesbian words. These words may be whispered over steaming cups of tea in crowded cafes, spoken hesitantly in college classes, muttered behind cash registers, breathed into our lover's hair, or defiantly yelled in gay pride marches, roared in self-defense classes. They may be written secretly in journals, scribbled in letters, read confidently at coffeehouses, transmitted over radio waves, or published proudly in books. These words exist because lesbians exist.

Lesbian Words is dedicated both to those lesbians who write and those who do not. We honor those women who could not send us their writing: because they were afraid to come out — afraid of losing their jobs, their children, their homes, or simply because they had no time to write, being too busy surviving. We are inspired by the lesbians who do not express themselves through writing: who play basketball, sing, bodysurf, throw pots, raft rivers, play the saxophone, paint houses, organize marches, inhabit darkrooms, dance, make love, ride motorcycles . . . Without these women, without a strong lesbian community, a lesbian culture, there would be no lesbian writers; there would be little inspiration or support for lesbian art, for a lesbian voice. *Lesbian Words* is thus dedicated to every woman who has the courage to open her mouth and say, even to herself, "I am a lesbian."

Ellen Bass

For Barbara, who said she couldn't visualize two women together

Picture lilacs.

Picture armfuls of lilacs, wet
with rain. Nuzzle your whole face
into the bouquet. Feel the cool drops
on your lips. Inhale.

Picture the ocean
from a cliff.

Stand at the edge, see
how the foam tumbles in
and disperses,
watch this heavy water
undulate until you're dizzy.
Lie down.

With one fingertip
touch the flat petal
of a California poppy. Lightly
travel the entire surface.
Close your eyes.

Imagine sun on your eyelids.
Recall the smell of wild mint
and the taste of wild blueberries
and the grace of coming upon a doe
at dusk by a river
and she does not bolt.
She lifts her gaze to you
before she goes on drinking.

Imagine damp seeds sending out blind roots
into the generous soil.
Picture the root hairs absorbing the mineral-rich drink.
Feel the turgid green push up
with a force that splits rock.
Hear the laughter.

Barbara, open your eyes.
Look at these women. You can visualize
any two
together.

In the photograph

for Janet and Sara

In the photograph
there is flour all over. White,
the unhealthy bleached kind. This is to be a birthday cake
and there has been enough of being sensible.

There is powdered sugar, bowls, measuring spoons, and melted chocolate.
There is chocolate on the child's face and up her arms
and flour like a dusting of snow down the front of her red dress
which was her mother's red peasant blouse
and which she, the child, confiscated from the give-away pile.
It needs tucks which the mother will sew before the party.
It is the child's birthday — her sixth.

The woman in the photograph holds the strainer.
She was appalled when she found cake mix and canned frosting
in the grocery bag. Her exact words to the mother were:
"You bought this crap?"

Now her hands are floured white and she has an intent expression
on her face. She resists smiling into the camera.
She is not opposed, though. Just the other day
she spoke of how important photographs were, how
as a child, she pored over those of her own mother.
"You should take pictures," she told the mother,
"to record these times, how you are now, for the child."
Wisps of hair curl against the angular planes of her face.
If anyone looks closely, it is clear she is handsome.

The child smiles into the camera.
It is one of those perfect smiles
not the school-picture grimace.
Her cheeks round as peaches, hair falling thickly to her waist.
Her eyes shine a little red from the flash and her hands are blurred.
She's clapping. At the moment recorded, they are open
fingers spread with glee.

The mother, of course, is taking the picture.
She slipped away for the camera when the red dress,
the white flour, the smell
of the chocolate, the squeals of the child, the calm
lake of the woman's face coalesced in her heart.

When the child searches the album for her mother's life
she will find many smiling poses,
but this one, perhaps, in which she does not even appear
is a truer self-portrait of her joy.

Live for it

Window curtain nodding in the May breeze
birds outside singing their high sweet scatter
inside a fly frantic against its mistake, buzzing the walls, the glass,
small thuds of failure —

Since my daughter's birth five rich years ago, I have never been without
the mantle of nuclear holocaust.
I feel it like crepe against my cheek.

The first year, I wept.
The exhaustion of nighttime nursing,
the demand of infant need,
the tidal love that broke upon my abundant body
left me sensible to knowledge I had shielded from so deftly before.

She reads now, prints, bounces a ball, ties bows,
washes her feet in the bath.
She says, "If you read one more story,
I'll let you sleep as late as you want in the morning."
She says, "Let's make up. We don't want to fight."
She says, "I love you more than I love you,"
which means, according to Snoopy she explains, "No bombs."

Nights, I watch her sleep, the glow of new being rosy on her skin
her breath, strawberries in the sun.
She is healthy, bright, funny.
If we lived in other times, I would say "Kineahora, let her be well,"
as my mother before me, hers before her.
And I would take care not to brag, protecting my naches from the wrath
of God or neighbors.
Yet inside I'd be smug. Contentment would tingle my blood like chablis.

Today I have no assurance,
only fear, fierce hope, and these precious days.
I no longer forget what is precious.

The curtain still bobs, the birds trill
the fly has chanced through the open window
and is on with its life —
maybe chanced is inaccurate.
It worked, tried over and over, hurling itself against all surfaces until
one did not resist and it was met by the familiar currents of wind.

Can that happen to us?
Miracles happen. What is nature but the most complex, amazing miracle?
Jasmine unfolding, the scent and color attracting the bees,
the darker veins guiding them toward the nectar,
honey in honeycombs, worms aerating soil, the levity of bird bones,
fins of fish, the eye blinking —
who could have ever conceived it?
the crescent moon, tender as new love in the luminescent blue,
milkweed silk — who could have imagined it?

And my lover, when she lifts her lips to me and I first feel that softness
warm like summer nights as a child
when she rubs against me like fur
and small cries escape my mouth like birds,
"Sing to me," she breathes
and I sing glory I did not know was mine to sing.

What is this but a miracle?
What is this but the improbable, marvelous reward of desire?

Desire — that fire I was taught to suspect,
that intensity I struggled to calm.
"Don't want too much," the voices warned.

No. Want. Want life.
Want this fragile oasis of the galaxy to flourish.
Want fertility, want seasons, want this spectacular array of creatures,
this brilliant balance of need.

Want it. Want it all.
Desire. Welcome her raging power.
May her strength course through us.
Desire, she is life. Desire life.
Allow ourselves to desire life, to want this sweetness
so passionately, that we live for it.

Courage, 1983

With acknowledgement to Lauren Crux for her work on women and courage.

In the grocery I buy beets.
My lover is coming to dinner tonight
and she has asked for borscht.
I choose the largest bunch: 89¢

There is no sour cream.
The aproned man tells me
"tomorrow morning." But my lover
is coming tonight.

Leaving, I see headlines:
U.S. Invades Grenada.
Fear coils within my ribs.
And anger — that just as my life blooms
into sweetness, these idiots
up the ante.

I feel foolish as I drive to another store.
What does it matter
if our borscht has sour cream
or doesn't.
But I buy the sour cream.

I scrub beets, chop
and put them to boil,
their rich red infusing the water.

This too is courage:
to cook, to eat
to seize our daily lives.

C. K. Morrison

At Frank's

This is a run-down little joint, the only place in town that serves dinner: Frank's Steakhouse and the Custer Club. The Custer Club is the bar in the back.

The restaurant is undistinguished. The laminated wood grain table tops, the fake wood paneling, the fluorescent lights, the lunch counter with the swivel stools. There is a dusty stuffed pheasant on the wall. The sign underneath says, "Please do not frighten the bird. It is the customer below who suffers the most." There is one of those plastic Coca-Cola ad boards on the wall. The daily special is advertised. Men would never think of taking off their baseball caps or cowboy hats at Frank's.

Steak is on the menu. Steak is what you can eat at Frank's. You could order something else, breaded veal patties maybe, or the seafood platter, but steak is what you should get. Four or five kinds of steaks: T-bone, top sirloin, filet, a "petite" steak for smaller appetites. Potatoes: mashed, baked or french-fried. Huge potatoes, this is Idaho. An iceberg lettuce salad. This is the meal at Frank's.

We are big news at Frank's, twelve or fifteen people trooping in every morning and evening. They push tables together, they are flustered and nervous about the orders, apologizing for being slow. The cook is overwhelmed the first night, she doesn't have enough steaks defrosted. Most of the steaks come to the table still slightly frozen in the middle. We are polite. She is embarrassed, and so grateful that no one is mad at her. She is prepared after that.

The people at Frank's are very accommodating. They want to please. They have the tables set up before we come in; they have the potatoes already baked and the salad in bowls. They try hard to keep the coffee cups filled. They put two extra hard-boiled eggs in Clint's sack lunch because he told them how much he liked eggs.

They really want to make things nice for people. They put flowers on the tables and have a special prime rib dinner for Mothers Day. All the mothers for miles around must have come to Frank's for dinner; they are all out of prime rib by the time we come in. I think they really had some, but they wanted to save it for the moms. They tell us they will make sure to get some for us next week.

They like to experiment with the menu from time to time, ordering some new food item from their distributor. Chicken cubes, pizza bombs, egg roll appetizers. Turkey spread. These things are disastrous, preformed and tasteless food substances. They seem designed especially for places like Frank's, places so far out of the way that ordinary standards don't apply. No normal restaurant would bother with anything called a pizza bomb. But they are trying hard to make the menu more interesting. They are, really.

The Custer Club is quite a bar. It's a large barren room behind the restaurant. The floor is slightly warped. There is a pool table, a jukebox and a broken video game. No one played it when it worked and now they can't get anyone to come to Mackay to fix it.

Behind the bar is the usual assortment of things that people bring into country bars. Funny postcards, pictures of fish and deer, old bottles. A dusty fuzzy thing, someone's idea of an Artesian. There are some rusty, oddly shaped tools on the walls. No one really knows what they are. Most likely they have something to do with cows or potatoes.

At the Custer Club you can have a shot of Jack Daniels with a Budweiser chaser. You could order something else, a martini maybe, or a Rusty Nail, but they wouldn't have what was needed and they probably wouldn't know how to make it. They don't have fancy drinks or fancy liquor. They don't even have fancy beer.

The matchbooks say "Frank's Steakhouse, Where Smart People Meet!" There is a silhouette picture of a stylish fifties couple. She is wearing a strapless gown and pearls; he is wearing a tuxedo. Inside the matchbook cover is a mileage chart. From Mackay to anywhere is a long way.

You can buy a baseball cap that says Custer Club, Mackay, Idaho.

It is graduation night at the local high school. There are flowers on the tables again. The waitresses and cooks are wearing corsages. They are waiting for the grads and their families to come for dinner. They are trying to remember what time their graduation ceremonies ended. It is getting late and no one has come in yet. They are serving some especially good rib steaks tonight.

Daffodils

The only thing wrong with daffodils is that they don't smell. A beautiful flower should smell something besides green. A big armful of half-opened blooms on a warm day smells pretty nice, if you breathe deeply. They actually smell yellow. A refrigerator full of daffodils smells nice too, but definitely green.

People don't really think of the flowers they see in the market or the florist shop. There they are cut, cleaned, fully-bloomed and arranged in paper or plastic. They seem sanitized and almost abstract. The basic thing about a flower is that it grows in dirt. It rains a lot where daffodils grow, that means mud. Mud makes flowers look terrible. You always have to watch out for the mud.

You also have to make sure that the flowers you pick aren't deformed, diseased or bug-eaten, that the stems are not too long or too short, that the flowers are not too open, too bent or too straight and that they all show some yellow. You have to make sure you snap the stem and not cut it, that you keep count of all the flowers in the bunch, and that all the stem bottoms are even. That the rubber band is not too high on the bunch, or too low, or too spread out, or too scrunched up. And that all the blooms are facing the same way, tails in back and shorts in front. You have to make sure you get all the pick-able flowers in your rows, and that no one else steals your bunches, and that you don't damage the flowers when you collect them.

That's all before you have to worry about rain, hail, wind, picking up to quota, daffodil poisoning, tyrannical field bosses and walking all day bent over double. You get less than a penny a flower.

But most people are only interested in the fact that the flower doesn't necessarily look like a flower when it is picked. In fact, once the flowers bloom, they are useless to the grower. They bruise too easily; the mud won't wash off and they are practically dead by the time they get to the retailer.

The flowers are covered with a sheath and they are picked as soon as the sheath splits, as soon as the smallest sliver of yellow shows. You get fat fields and thin fields. Fields can come in all of a sudden and it is impossible to pick all the flowers before they bloom out.

There is a real feeling of panic when this happens, especially if you are alone in the field and the wind is blowing and it is starting to rain. The rain makes it feel like the air is dropping on top of you, slowing you down, holding you motionless. The rain is going to fall and the flowers are going to bloom and you and your knife make no difference at all. It's like a slow yellow wave. You can only stand and watch it happen.

The fields look spectacular the next day, acres of brilliant yellow. The field boss might say that the field got away from us. The owner is probably upset about all the money that has been lost. It doesn't seem to me that anything has been wasted. *I'm standing in a field of flowers.*

The farm is a nice place. It's on a bluff overlooking Moonstone Beach. When you get tired of looking at the flowers you can look at the ocean, or the mountains to the east. When it is foggy you can hear the horn from Trinidad Head.

Maybe it's best when it's raining. The pickers look absurd in their yellow rain suits tramping through the rows. They are bright little bumps in the dark, muddy fields.

And the flowers flash, they are startling, so intensely yellow in the gloom. These daffodils, from the dark and the rain and the mud will be in flower stalls in San Francisco or Seattle tomorrow, clean and perfect. Someone will smile at their brilliance. Or they will go to Denver in the middle of a snowstorm. Someone will be dazzled. A remarkable thing.

Even after all this time and exposure, flowers are still astonishing, incredible. Several times a day, a flower, one, extraordinary flower stops all motion in my mind and body. It is stunning in its perfection. Even though it doesn't smell.

1983

Patty Paludan

Best Foot Forward

The first day we went to bed together
I was in such a hurry
I forgot to take off my socks.
We laughed about it later.
“Do you always wear your socks to bed?”
 you asked.

I knew, but couldn't tell you
that I didn't want to get cold feet.

A New Broom

I'm waiting for a woman to come by
and sweep me off my feet.
I'll know her when I see her,
she's strong and confident,
and she'll smile at me and say,
“I'll take you home!”

Those of us who grew up in the straight life
never learned to ask a woman out,
to be the one who does the sweeping
of anything but floors.

And so we wait.

Deborah Abbott

In the Naming

for Gail

The idea for this poem came from an article about Meridel LeSueur, who is attempting to write a novel without using nouns. Some of the inspiration for this novel grew from her interest in the Hopi Indians, whose language has no nouns. LeSueur says "In their language, there is only the relationship, not the naming. We don't realize how subtle this is, that to name something is to end it."

We had not planned to be lovers.
We were two women.
We had been friends for so long
we could no longer remember
the beginning
nor conceive any end.
Even through the separations
we had always found each other, somehow,
and had clung by the tenacity of our words
through the mail.

I had imagined being lovers
many years ago,
in the small village of Chapala,
where we shared a bed
in that windowless,
whitewashed room.
We were far from home,
from boyfriends and family.
Drowsy from the sun and Mexican liquor,
we lay naked between the starched white sheets.
It would have been easy.
And yet, we only whispered
until it grew dark,
and kissed,
and tucked the broad arches of our feet
together like spoons.

You had imagined being lovers earlier,
in the beginning,
when we lived as neighbors
in the cottages by the sea.
We had finished one of our first dinners together.
You put a towel to the ground,
poured oil into your hands,
and rubbed the length of my body until it shone.
Later you told me
that for a moment you had considered
how delicious it would have been
to have slid your hand lower
into my glistening fur.

We never expected to be lovers that evening
I had spread myself out on the bed beside Matthew,
offering my breast.
While he nursed, you lay beside me,
talking softly.
Matthew finally slept;
his lips slackened, releasing my nipple
from above his grainy tongue.
I rolled over to face you.
Our conversation had been solemn,
yet I hadn't known you were crying.
Even in the darkness I could see the tears
streaking your face.
'Oh, Gail,' I whispered.
As my own tears came, we laughed,
and stroked the wetness from each other's cheeks,
our fingers like wipers in a blinding rain.
You traced my tears to the little pocket
above my lips.
I felt the tiny hairs on the curve of your fingers
as they stroked,
the hairs above your lips as they met mine.
I enclosed the wetness of your cheeks
against my breasts until,
sobbing and laughing,
we somehow undressed each other
and were making love.

It was in the naming
that the loving faltered.
When I call myself a poet
my words grow to enormous proportions,
totter above the page,
precarious as a juggler on stilts.
It is better, I think,
to write words which are grounded
in the truth of the common life
and for me to go unnamed.

I want to come back to the loving
when the naming no longer confines me,
when I cannot be reduced to the woman
who must wear emblems
on a fragile chain around her throat.

I want to be known
as the woman who hangs laundry,
cooks breakfast,
suckles babies.
As the woman who waits for buses humming,
reading novels, writing poems.
I want to be known as the woman who loves,
loves herself,
loves women.
As the woman who loves loving women.
Let us come back
when I can be all of that
and that alone.

Edith Peck

Beating the Odds

I made the decision five months ago
after waking up
disgusted with myself once again

disgusted with the smell
of cigarettes and alcohol
on my breath, my clothes, my hair
disgusted with my "weakness"

I could no longer hope
to be a "social drinker"
I had to admit I simply
couldn't handle alcohol

After five months sober I wonder
why didn't I stop sooner
I suppose I wanted to beat the odds

In five months I've celebrated
Christmas, New Year's Eve,
the end of a school term,
and my thirty-first birthday
all without alcohol

I've even visited my parents
where alcohol has comforted me most
I've watched my father drink brandy
and my brothers drink beer
And I ache with despair
because the memory is too fresh
when I would have joined them
and I celebrate because I don't
and I realize
I have beaten the odds.

May, 1984

Alene Smith

Never a Missus — The Oldest Dyke in Santa Cruz

Lydia Gordon is a large, full-bodied, throaty-voiced woman with a robust laugh, shrewd, twinkling eyes and an optimistic outlook on life. She lives in a multi-racial, multi-generational community we share in the heart of our city. When I went about circulating information about the Neighborhood Food Co-op, we met and fast became buddies.

Born in 1919, Lydia has lived in Santa Cruz off and on for forty years. She first came to Santa Cruz in 1937, where she lived in a duplex on May Street. The rent was — \$45 a month.

During the Great Depression she lived with her mother and one younger brother in her grandmother's home in San Jose. Her family didn't have a telephone; they made use of an outhouse, and secured French bread for a penny a loaf. They went to local farms for surplus produce. After working as walnut pickers, they ventured to make and sell tamales and enchiladas, door to door, for twenty-five cents. They conducted this activity for many months before officials stopped them for not having a sales license.

Her mother dreamed of becoming a film actress and made several unsuccessful attempts. Lydia describes her mother as having been a "flapper," which in her generation meant a "loose" woman. She quietly remembers her mother as being "more of a friend," while her grandmother was nurturing, affectionate, more sensitive. She recalls countless times she slept snuggled up in bed with her grandmother, and delightful occasions when she and her mother went to dances held at an Elk's club on Pacific Avenue.

As a young woman, through patience, love, experience, and a doctor's supervision, Lydia acquired skills as a practical nurse. She cared for elderly women and men for years. During that time, she met an exciting woman with an enchanting Swedish accent.

"It was the year Pearl Harbor was attacked. I went to have a beer at a bar on Pacific Avenue one hot, lazy day in September. I was sitting there and this woman came in with her dog. We smiled at each other from a distance. She ordered another beer for me and soon we were chatting away, listening to the jukebox and singing. We walked to her home on Washington Street and made love all night. Next day, I moved in with her!"

Their relationship continued for nine years. She and Sara worked at restaurants together.

"In those days you didn't come out of no 'closet' — you hid! We would leave work *separately*."

What was it like being in the closet? Lydia states, "I wasn't all too bothered, really." If people said *anything*, she figured that they said it where she couldn't hear. Any strange looks? "No."

"I was bothered about Sara showing affection toward me in public. She'd call me "darling" and "sweetheart" out loud and it was damn scary."

Despite her feeling social awkwardness and trepidation, no one expressed ridicule, including their landlady who referred to the two women as "the girls," and was quite fond of them. No one hinted at being critical of their relationship. This was during the early 50's, while living in San Francisco.

"We were like two peas in a pod. Wherever we went we were known as a couple. We never *heard* the word 'lesbian' used. Not like it is today. It was always kinda fun having a secret."

The strongest fear Lydia had was relatives knowing about her. She heard society echoing words: "It's wrong." "It's a sin." "It's evil." "It's against the Bible." Lydia simply "didn't make waves" and kept silent. Then, while she and Sara shared a tiny apartment in an old hotel in San Francisco, with a pet dog named Zuda, there came a strange knock on their door one early morning.

"I thought it was just a neighbor. (All our neighbors liked and accepted us.) Well, I opened the door and in steps my crazy mother! My heart jumped in my throat. She looked around, noticed the bed right away. Sara pulled the blankets over herself. My mother announced that her suspicions had been confirmed. I told her that I had a good job and was very happy and that was that! There was no reasoning with her. She told me if I left Sara and came back home she'd leave me lots of money when she died."

When she and Sara moved to Santa Rosa, Lydia learned there were other women 'like' herself.

"They began coming into the 'June Bug' nightclub. Many were divorced, had babies, were kicking the men out of their lives. I felt like Sara and I were the only ones, then, soon enough I sure saw that we were not!"

Very, very privately, back in 1953, Lydia had an adventuresome affair with a married woman.

"We'd sneak off or meet when her husband wasn't around. I wasn't afraid until he implied being suspicious with the remark to his wife, "you two make a cute couple." I thought sure he'd get hostile but he didn't. He was in the army and whenever they moved to another city, I'd move too!" Before the husband caught on to the ongoing relationship, Lydia would wait in her car a block from her lover's house until she saw a blinking of the porch light as a signal. When the husband was stationed in Europe, the wife begged Lydia to move again. She refused.

During her teen years Lydia brazenly escaped several sexual assaults, including one by an uncle. Despite this, she's always enjoyed friendships with men.

"In grammar school I had a boy playmate who ignored my love notes. At twelve I had a girl playmate and we were intimate. At thirteen I remember exploring with a boy and we made marriage fantasy-plans . . . I've had experiences the 'other' way. I've often met men who liked fat women," she chuckles, but then wistfully recalls the happiest time in her life was living with Sara in Santa Rosa, where they felt more freedom and space to be themselves away from societal repression, and Lydia sang and played harmonica at the 'June Bug.'

Lydia shows me a small scar on her arm where she and Sara had cut themselves, forty years ago, to ritualistically exchange blood and verbal vows to each other. "A pile of gold couldn't take me away from Sara. She was the deepest love I ever shared with anyone."

But time, changes, human nature, life — finally did separate her from Sara. Not long after the end of their relationship, Lydia found herself attracted to a divorced woman who'd hinted at their becoming involved, and followed her to Los Angeles.

"When I got to the address she'd sent me, she was living with a man. I rented a room in a mansion owned by a former silent film actress. I wasn't going to play any 'games' and compete. I had a short affair with a bartender woman and worked a man's job. It was a company that made rifles."

The male workers resented Lydia's strength for physical labor, and her proficient use of machines and a knife tool. Women employees in another part of manufacturing covertly expressed disapproval of her working with men and making more money than them.

"I did the work as fast as the men. They were jealous. One guy said, 'Watch out ya don't cut up yer boob!' I said to him, 'I'll use this tool on you!' That shut him up."

Lydia was always somewhat anxious about her job security, especially in the nursing field. Employers would ask her, "When are you getting married?" She'd just sweetly reply, "Oh, some day . . . some day." Their presumption that she was heterosexual didn't faze her. She let the remarks and questions slide by.

"I let 'em think and say whatever they wanted to. I wasn't going to blurt out — 'hey, look! I'm a lesbian!' It was a private, secret issue."

With the advent of the national gay movement, Lydia felt relief that it was "about time." She has always felt that one's sexual preference is "nobody's business," and at the same time she thinks it's nothing to hide, at least now, nor be shameful about. She expresses delight over public knowledge of Mayor Laird.

"I've known brilliant men who were gay. I knew a gay FBI agent! It doesn't mean you can't do a good job! What you do when you go home, your private life, under the covers, that's your own damn business!"

Lydia has continued a friendship with two "straight" women for over twenty years. Both women had multiple marriages. Lydia firmly believes they've been sexually repressed and frustrated throughout their adulthood. Both women are alcoholics. With one of them, Lydia has talked openly and shared physical affection. Ironically, the other woman was erotically intimate with Lydia, once, never to refer to the episode again, nor ever to discuss the reality of any kind of sexuality.

In 1976, Lydia had a biopsy which confirmed that she had cancer in her breast. She aggressively refused the doctor's decision to perform a mastectomy. The only other course was radiation and chemotherapy, during which she endured months of agony. Her two women friends were both emotionally supportive. Lydia survived, but the chance of cancer striking other parts of her body is a stark reality she has lived with.

Meanwhile, she's living contentedly and alone with vivid memories and no regrets. It's all gone by so fast. She sips her cups of tea, listens to stimulating talk shows on her radio, and loves watching football on television.

Lydia and I have shared a concerned fondness for each other during the past sixteen months. I do errands for her, and she gives me food items from her weekly bag from Grey Bears. As much as our lives differ, we admire our separate generations, and look after each other.

Sue McCabe

Adriana

You stand on a ledge
thirty feet above my head
directing strings of cans
into throats of hungry machines
back and forth you walk
as if on a tightrope
sweat drips from your chin
as your dark eyes penetrate
the white heat
in my dreams
you are a dancer.

1983

Hegira

They had forgotten
to pluck the hairs that grew
beneath her chin.
No one had bothered
to shave her legs.
It was important to her.

They led her down
the stiff, white halls.
There were no shadows then
clinging to air
only the eyes of others.
The orderly wore a clip-board,
a clean-shaven face.
Her slippers made a dull noise,
her arms hung from their sockets
unclaimed;
a nurse passed by.

Outside, the trees were bare.
The sky gave away nothing.
They entered a room
strapped her down,
not like childbirth,
attached electrodes
to her clean-shaven head.
She remembered to breathe.
A finger pulled a switch.
She forgot to close her eyes,
saw a bird escape from her head.

1984

Anita Adams

Hello

Hello, damaged one.

incested . . . battered . . . alcoholled . . . deprived . . . starved . . . abandoned . . .
sacrificed . . .

Hello.

'Scuse me, but how . . . can *you* be a lover
when your little girl is wandering around
in *your* thirty-five year old body?

She just woke up from a long rest,
and she's back to get what she never
got before

love, nourishment, acceptance, maybe?

*I have to let her stay around
as long as she needs to!*

I want to get to know her.

I want to remember her.

I look at her pictures
(she was cute; why did no one love her?)

I want her to tell me about me.

I want to see me through her eyes
and see her through my eyes.

I want her to whisper her secrets
in my ear.

I want to hear her giggle . . .

I don't think she did that much.

I want to hold her

love her

be gentle with her

let her know it *is* going to be alright.

Hello. So damaged, so sad,
so broken into so many different pieces
I can't even gather them together
and start putting them back together!
It's like sitting
all alone
in a large, empty room,
cross-legged on the cold floor
and all around are the scattered pieces
of your 35 years —

over there your mom beating you, over here your brother
getting you to go to bed with him when you were 5,
your dad grabbing you from a darkened hallway, your dad
molesting you (how long? I want you to tell me), your
mom and dad taking turns beating you, you beating others,
friends you never had, sweet relationships that never were,
your anger, your violence, your little girl surviving
and trying to cope while you tried so hard to kill her
with alcohol, the life you never knew you could have,
each year lost in misery, count them, until you get to 35 . . .
you can't move from your spot (that's the rule) and you stretch out
your arms to gather the pieces together
and your fingertips can't reach them —
You must reach them to cope in this screwed world —
You must be whole, together, there for your lover,
daughter, friends, school.
You swing your arms, sweeping the air,
trying so hard, working, sweating, straining . . .
and all the pieces stay where they are —
out of reach, separate, sore, gray, dead.

And the tears start to fall.

Hello, damaged one.
The longer I'm around you
the less I know what you're all about.
I do know that some wild part of you
is fighting back.
I've been reacquainted with the violent you —
She came back, a black specter from the past . . .
and I don't like her.
Make her go away!
(no one ever liked her . . . she was always punished . . .
no one ever asked her why she was so angry . . .
damn it, she's part of me too!)
She has value . . . she gave me an idea what I must do.
I must let the tears come up
and let them come out
and let them fall
and let others see them.
Tears of terrible loss and grief
must be shed so that terrible,
violent one will go silently
away
and
not
come
back.
and they drop
one by one
roll down my cheeks
make my nose run.
save my life, drops of pain
save my sanity
save the goodness I know is in me
save what small family I have —
my daughter and my lover
save me

Elizabeth Carruthers

Amy

i know you're healing
cuz i dreamt
i saw you dancing
used to have to get
fucked up
to dance

radiant
sober
the high
you was feeling
wasn't no
shit
seducing your brain cells

rather
the high a small child feels
when she walks
for the first time
on her own
without something
other than herself
taking her through
the motions

1984

Toni Cassista

I hear echoes
echoes
that beat
deep within my heart
silent screams
of pleading to be set free

I see the looks
looks from those
who never try
to understand
I close my eyes
and, I can see
their looks
I can hear their words
looks and words
that cut swiftly
through my soul

They say,
"If you wanted, really wanted to
you could"
They say,
"I had ten pounds to lose
once"
"Well, I just put my mind to it
and it was done"
and without a word
the conversation ended
ended with
their success
their triumph
ended, and the scar
I took so long
to heal
opened, again

I wanted to say
How the hell do you know
What makes you think
Why do you constantly
Jump
to the conclusion
I haven't tried

but, how can I expect
them to understand
when I'm just beginning to
myself

Irene Reti

This Was Not Your Country

It was a desolate place we walked through, a land still scarred from the heat of a fire storm two and one half centuries past. Orange and black lava hills rose, dry, barren of life, save for an occasional small tree or a pale blade of grass huddled in the hollows between the legs of dune which stretched across the barren landscape. You stood in front of one of those mountains of lava shards, and I took a picture of you, for perspective we said. And we laughed uneasily because you were so small. You pointed at the twisted trees rooted in the black ash and called them a "symbolic triumph of life over death."

It was too hot. We turned back. The infernal sun sucked the moisture out of our skin, as we struggled through sand composed of fine gray cinders which clung to our boots. We sank with each step. Earlier we had been fascinated by the strange destruction around us; now we grew horrified, chilled by the heat. We clung to our single bottle of water as if it were a jewel. Heat haze shimmered across the bare earth; you kept pointing at it swimming across the path. A black cinder cone rose 1,000 feet into the air, looming on the horizon like some ominous presence.

The sun dissolved your strength and you stopped abruptly in the shade of a dying tree by the edge of the lava flow, closed your eyes. You hugged the tree as if it were a dying friend, or one already lost. We stood like that for several moments, you with your arms around the tree, me holding you. You were very still and I have seldom seen you look so sad.

You said, holding that tree you could almost feel the fire of that eruption, hear the burning animals crying, the chipmunks dying, the birds. You said, "there was a forest here." You said, "they could make the whole world look like that." And you kept apologizing for your tears, somehow afraid I would think you were crazy for seeing this ghost forest, for feeling these things. They have burned us for less.

Finally you wrenched yourself away from the dead tree and we hiked back across the black ash. We stopped several times. At the top of the tallest hill I held your hand and begged you to drink the last of our water, pointed at the edge of the forest growing closer, and the cool lake beyond. You drank, but you would not take your eyes from the bare red earth, not to look at me or the approaching trees.

I wanted to present those first scraggly trees to you as a gift, something that would take the grimness out of your face, bring you back to me. But it wasn't until we reached the shore of the lake that you came back. You put your arms around me and we walked straight into the deep green water with our pants on, up to our waists, and then only paused long enough to strip the dusty clothes off, toss them on the white shore. The fever left your cheeks, and you swam and at last you smiled.

This was not your country I took you to, my love. You are from another land, a lush land of meadows and English farmhouses, a gentle, ripe land wrapped in fog, a green land. And when you said you wanted to go someplace green, I, a child of concrete and scrub desert, thought you meant scattered pine and fir. I did not understand.

1984

Camouflage

All my fantasies of being submissive, being controlled were being acted upon . . . The politics of SM began to be part of my entire being . . . What has happened to our movement when 'feminists' spend so much time and energy building torture chambers, buying wrist restraints . . . I feel that breaking the addiction to SM was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

"Letter From A Former Masochist"

Marissa Jonel

from *Against Sadomasochism*

edited by Robin Ruth Linden et al.

I. Gay Pride Parade, San Francisco, 1984

I have come in search of my community.
I am cold. 250,000 queers line the streets but
alcohol flows thick here.

Aryan figures pass —
blond men with
bulging, bronzed biceps
tight black leather pants,
storm trooper jackets,
heavy silver chains, spiked collars,
swastikas, rigid walks
and lean, hard faces.

In the parade a tow truck floats by,
a man strapped in chains
swinging in helpless glory.
Everyone is laughing, drunk.
Two women roar by on a Harley.
One is holding a whip over
her lover's shoulder;
she is laughing too.

In the book I am reading
a woman makes love to her lover
against her lover's will.
Her lover cries in a hoarse voice —
"Please — don't."
The author writes:
"When she comes she makes
a strange gurgling sound,
convulsing like one killed while surprised."*

Someone I know once said,
"It isn't a relationship unless it hurts."
Once I loved a woman.
We hurt each other —
her silent detachment,
my bitter accusations.
And each time we fought I cried
and each time I cried
I fell more in love with her.
Today she writes poetry to her male lover:
"I throw my soft self daily
at your hardened eyes."

How can we resist,
not mistake
struggle for love,
submission for intimacy?

II. Image Pollution

Matter-of-factly, my very own mother
told me my father liked bondage magazines,
obtained pleasure from fantasizing about tying her up, and
starved for love as she was, my fierce
independent mother tried
to go along.

Sexuality does not live cloistered.
My father comes out of his bedroom,
passes me in my bathing suit.
His eyes investigate my body, he says,
"you have a nice figure." I turn away,
run from the large palm on my shoulder.
His images follow me down the street.
I hate my breasts. I am running,
running like a hunted deer,
smog in my eyes, the ticking of men's bombs
fast on my heels. They are trying to tie me up;
there is no safe place to go, least of all home.

How will we escape?
We struggle daily
against this seductive
onslaught of images
carefully engineered
to smother our gentleness.
"Let me sell you a drink, a whip, a car, a chain, a toy." they say,
"Let me sell *you*."
They want us to break each other
at home, at night, in our "privacy."
There are no swastikas on their suit jackets.
We are wearing them.

III. History

I have come in search of my community —
to Nuremberg, 1937
where my mother is kept awake by
"Sieg Heil!" in a thousand voices
from the stadium across the street.
She escaped Germany.

My father dodges death from Hungary
to Russia to Turkey to Venezuela to America.
His father bribed ambassadors.
If they had not had money I wouldn't be writing this.

I was baptized Unitarian,
went to Congregational grammar school,
Catholic high school. Then
at my grandfather's funeral
everyone wore strange hats, spoke a language I'd never heard.
My mother says being Jewish is a religion,
there is no such thing as looking Jewish.
I look around the circle of my Jewish women friends;
are we in danger?

Nazis had color-coded categories —
yellow for Jews
pink for homosexuals, red for Communists,
other colors for politicians and criminals.
If they captured me would I
wear three badges as a
political Jewish lesbian.

I dream I am at a gay parade.
Everyone is dancing.
I sit frozen I know
the Nazis are coming.
My lover dreams she is watching
a gay play in San Francisco
when suddenly the back doors crash open,
bulldozers rage through the theatre.

It does not matter that she is not Jewish.
We are lesbians.
If they come
they will take both of us.

IV. Passing

I write these words
on a BART train heading northward.
A man at the back of this car is
drunken, angry, loud.
Everyone stares straight ahead
faces neutral, pretending not to hear.
I have learned to pass,
mastered the fine art of camouflage.
When I write the word lesbian
I cover it with my hand.

Even in this small town we have our own parade.
But the newspaper that covers it is harassed
by angry men and women who claim
a moral imperative.

I am a child of two holocaust survivors;
swastikas upset me.
I've stared at my white face in the mirror and
I won't invest in whips and chains.
I have been trapped
under a man's weight, his
thrusts impaling me and
I'm tired of submission.

In search of my community,
I find them playing with weapons that will implode.

We carry the seeds of violence
embedded in our sexual passion
as invisible, as deadly
as plutonium burrows in the
soft hairs of our lungs, waiting.
Where is there clean air?

V. For You

You do not pass easily for straight.
You wear your swagger and
handsome face with pride.
Sometimes they brand you *dyke*, *bulldagger* and
we walk tough and fast,
eyes roaming.

There is nothing passive about us together,
nor is there violence.
Our bodies move
but not in struggle.
I come openly,
with unabashed strength.

**Loving Her*, Ann Shockley

1984

Cynthia Gray

Occurring Glorification

My mind sees
eyes are closed
ears hear distant
rustling of leaves.
Water moves slowly
towards shore.

In the magical place
where feeling is contained
beauty escapes.

There is holiness
that each heart knows.

Period of Wool in Moon

So, I hear your voice. Seems so distant, so different. There is strength. I absorb much.

Flowers and roses and roses are flowers but special.

There is a sound, it keeps arousing music; uplifting version of song — a song of Grace. I see eyes peering from side of slits on face. Water in glasses shakes with my hand.

Foot sleeps — book folds and goes to bed for a week or weeks until I express with ink, again.

April Kane

Dykes Ain't Pretty

Dykes ain't pretty
Some gay man told me that
Well, then I guess I ain't pretty
But my lady
She's got the
softest short brown hair
And the deepest mean brown eyes
She makes me smile
She's beautiful
So then I guess she ain't no dyke.

A. Bee

The Melody Club

A concrete shell block of a building:
one side a laundromat,
the other
fantasyland for Southern queer boys
who never took the train to Broadway.
Dusty curtains
hanging heavy with the pheromones
of sorry old queens
and the dance hall dust
of the old home town.
The red, swollen masks of hard drinking
wearing glitter and pancake smiles,
shamelessly strut like good whores
on black and white checkered linoleum
through beer and blood, piss and palm trees
in an orange gator steamy swamp town.

Like shrinking women
we allow the men to insult us
with their fantasies,
to flaunt what we choose not to be.
But we are not submissive women,
we are women who love other women.
Isolated and lonely,
naively bobbing in a sea of pickup trucks
trailers, beer cans and football —
we are driven to forage
what little self-respect can be found.
There is no social acclaim for our love.
There is no reward for the choice we make,
no headstart in the form
of toasters and towels
no blessings from family members
bearing envelopes and blenders.

Rita Long

it's funny

it's
funny
how i see
two women
pairing and i
hope to god they're
lovers for the beauty
and the tender their
lovetouch would produce
i can't think a sight more
lovely than womansoft touch
womansoft — the gentle givetake
sharing rapture of forbidden
holy union of Eve nuzzling
Eve — the strongsilk cords
of mutual comprehension
i love lovers but they
make me sad for i
can't help but
wish one
would
find
me

one time

one
time
he raped me
but
i didn't want to
live with
rape
so i made him
and me
make me think
i wanted
it
(but i didn't
and i always
knew
i didn't)
and so
now i've
sexed
but i'm sorry
i didn't want
it to be
that
way

Cally Haber

Excerpts from a Camping Trip Journal

Sunday

I have come backpacking with this group of women, wanting a vacation, a trip away from where I live caught up in day to day routines, involvements, commitments, entanglements (pleasures too), worries and plans . . . to a new environment, away from people, a place to feel clear and focused, unrushed, to quiet the rhythm of my life, to hear again the voice I have inside that I catch only small murmurings of as I run by the ocean, walk in the forests near my home.

There are challenges here too, and being with a group of women creates a safe space for me to push myself, push the limits of my body. The encouragement, support, non-judgmental teaching and sharing that can happen among women was a vital part of my choice to come on this trip, knowing whatever level of knowledge and experience about backpacking I would bring would be valued, my fears respected, my skills in other areas acknowledged and brought into use. I've backpacked before, but for no more than a few days at a time. I've wanted to try a longer trip, learn more about survival skills, get my body used to the hard work, grow stronger.

Monday 7:30 am

Gretchen is up from her sleep; she stands naked, feet planted wide, bracing, as she bends over to brush her hair. I can feel the pull of the brush on my own scalp, watching each raising of her hand and long stroke of the brush. The night was very cold and clear. I woke many times to clack my toes together, spark some life, some warmth — even wool socks didn't help. My right calf cramped in early morning, rousing me to knead it and turn over and over, my hips sore from sleeping on the ground. The stars were luminous — the dipper just overhead — they extended down all sides of the sky. I'm not used to sleeping under a dome, a bowl-shaped sky, the stars bright between the pines in every direction. The sun, once up, quickly warms the ground, takes the chill from the air. Bodies lying still, encased in sleeping bags, begin to stir — we all peel away the night layers, opening our bodies, waking, uncovering skin to day's warmth. The wet of night on clothes and bags lifts quickly. Wildflowers are everywhere — soft, spectacular, light yellow yucca in clusters, reds and purples, oranges and blues and whites, tangy yellows, lush greens.

Tuesday

I'm lying in a meadow at the bottom of the world — insects dance in whirls, lazy swoops, tiered circles above, they fill the air. Small black curved ones, black-bodied flies, slow, yellow flies which bite hard but are very slow and so satisfyingly easy to kill, millions of ladybugs — they bite too. I have never seen so many ladybugs — entire trees and rocks coated with them. Lying lazy in the shade of the great pine we sleep beneath, with only the sound of water. We were all awake and moving around for at least a half hour this morning before anyone spoke — holding in the quiet.

Wednesday

I am sitting on a big rock in the sun feeling rather turtle-esque. The rock is near a rounded pool of deep green-blue water fed by a fifty foot high waterfall that juts between rocks, flumes down the cliff face, then suddenly shoots out into the air to hit rock and moss in a series of stairs. I'm alone. The route here was up and down a rock and dirt trail, clutching at stones and roots, squeezing around trees. I fell once — decided to take a route across a steep slope and grabbed for a root — it held, but didn't catch me as fast as I thought it would; it was sort of fun. Challenging.

We talked last night about challenging ourselves (I added the importance for me of learning it's okay to *not* push myself, sometimes) and fears. I am afraid to swim too far out in this pool because I can't see the bottom and the falls are fierce and spectacular, and yet I know it wouldn't hurt me. But somehow I can't convince myself. I think I would do it if someone was here with me. On the way to the waterfall I saw two water ouzels, funny brown-grey birds hopping along the rocks, going in and out of the water, making a high-pitched whistling chirrup, bobbing up and down. I have read that they swim/fly up waterfalls, even swim underwater.

Later —

I took it slow and went all the way out in the middle of the waterfall pool, where it was clear and blue with a sandy bottom. I was scared but exhilarated, and found it was so deep that I couldn't touch bottom without going under. I paddled there looking up at the falls and whooping a bit, hollering, feeling good, then I swam back to the big log at the edge. Going back to camp I felt very smug — this was a solo of sorts, a small adventure clambering over rocks and finding my way, losing and finding the trail.

Sunday

Another solo, up the steepest trail, up, climbing for miles, hot, sweaty and feeling great, strong and tanned and dirty, covered with insect bites, scratches, feet blistered. I feel so beautiful. Grubbiness feels good, the cycle of wet and dry, clean and dirty, hot and cold.

Saturday

Arriving back at the trailhead, grimy and tired with a glow of completeness. I can close my eyes and see part of a creek, the water running over the rocks, and hold that sweetness within my chest. This land is in my bloodstream; I hope it stays a long while. So dusty and hot back at the camp. Disassembling packs to fit us all into the car. Cars and streets have been part of nearly my entire life. I know what to do with them, they are familiar. But now here's a separateness, a distinction. I notice my breathing change, from chestfuls of sweet mountain air to shallow avoidance of exhaust fumes.

I can feel the pitch rise, a frenzy of got-to-get-here, rising level of anxiety as we drive through town. I also see myself taking everything in stride in a much easier way than usual, as when I meditated very regularly some years back. The woods quiet is still within me.

I re-discovered my body — how it moves, how it hurts, how far I can push myself — found my child side again, explorer, wanderer, daydreamer. Alert, standing free in my body, toned strong, unclothed and belly out, like a child's, *relaxed*. Not holding it in for anyone. And I hear my inner voice speak — from the simplest needs: I am hungry, I am warm, to the complex choices of what to do with my life.

De Clarke

Privilege II

I am a small thorn in the side
easy to ignore, for a woman's voice
is always trivial, and a woman's life
always reducible, to fat and ashes
about a stake, or to vicious tidbits
of sexual slander traded at coffee breaks
I do not attend

at work I do not meet what you would call friends

still I am a woman without colour
a lesbian without a lover
blending in gradually with white
men's white offices and walls
till in this erosive fashion
bike or no bike, political passion
or none at all, dyke or no dyke
I leave no ring around their collars

1981

not like flowers

like film I am marked with the moment: a still
in which we stand always in the dusty golden air
of a living temple, tall trees alight and alive;
your hands are hot on my back, pulling
at the ends of some knot that has been tied low between my legs,
and heat flares, spontaneous combustion
mysterious in me as in damp leaves

I can no more breathe than you can after the wave hits you;
I am underwater, both silent and full of roaring:
noise and stillness fight fluttering among my ribs,
I lose direction except the one:
towards

if you could only hear the thunder
if you could only hear the wind

I have heard high voltage arc audibly across air,
blue-white and ragged, heard the drone
and crackle of electricity escaping or confined: I recognize it now.
in me is the rising note of turbines warming up
and the minute quivering of the wound spring

in me is the twitching tendon of the poised runner
the tremble of the drawn bow; in me
the haunches of the startled deer bunch and gather,
the cat's tail thrashes once and is rigid, in me
is the charged hush after the lightning, the loaded leisure
of the rock as it starts to roll

if you could only hear the engines winding out
if you could only feel the rumble under the skin

my head rattles with words I dare not say for fear
to give them breath would give men more pornography —
words leap in the deafening water, shoals and schools of them
flash tumbling in the roaring and the silence;
I would pour words over you, a shower of silk,
the cat's intent self-commentary — but I remember
where I learned them

in me is the shriek of rubber on asphalt;
in me is the murmur of infinite hives
aswarm and single-minded;
the rising applause of whole flocks
of wide wings, upwards,
and the quiet of large crowds before extraordinary events;
in me is the sound of huge machineries at work
more felt than heard, and the silence of large things
falling

if you could only feel the steel rails shivering
if you could only hear the dynamo as it spins

in me is motion quick as lizards
and patience like warm stone;
I lie upon you, mine is the steady weight of rain
hissing inside, with the hot smell of ozone
and the sharp perfume of wet dust;
in me shines something like the suspended hummingbird
sure as the ripples in the tree's heart spread
from the flung seasons

if you could breathe me I would fill your lungs with sparks:
your mouth would taste of earth and hot spices;
if you could drink me I would burn down like strong spirits
and still turn to sweet milk in your stomach;
if you could see inside me you would see darkness and great shapes
moving slowly,
and the obscure speech of whales would whistle back to your shell ears

if you could hear the idling hum of large amplifiers
if you could read the diver's mind just as the long dive begins

I can feel things spinning, the singsong of bearings at high speed:
I am a Ferrari on a flat ribbon of road, you driving, and I am
limitless and unquenchable; the late hot sun of summer
is no more golden and glorious than I, I feel my strength enormous
as mastodons, as earth-shaking and slow
while the flicker and dart of a snake's tongue touches
all my vulnerable places

I would flow into you like fog if I could
surround you like a river in flood, I would
be drowning now if you were water, and content
I would sink down smiling;
your hands tune me taut as a steel string
across your resounding body; what flows between us in near-silence
is no less than music, if I could write it truly
people would read, and cry; from you my hands draw fire
till they feel capable of shaping worlds

if you could only feel the stone rumble, the leaf grow,
the blue steel tremble in the curve of the coiled spring

if you could visit here inside me you would know
you owe me no thank you, it is I who owe
you everything

1984

Geology

I.

There is in all this the element
of myth becoming real, dream
manifest in daylight, hope
poking up green through brittle fear,
islands steaming up, roaring into the light

what I had thought mere
poetic metaphor metamorphoses
subtly into literal truth, the ground shifts
angels walk the earth, and a certain protective pessimism
melts reluctant as glaciers
altering whole landscapes where it recedes

II.

Lateral displacement: it opens unplanned gates
in hundred-year fences, diverts even water
from its long habits;
when the dancing ground frightens our feet
it is only the Goddess twitching in Her sleep
a hunting beast

Her dreaming hurts no one; it is falling stone that kills,
the inflexible fortresses we kid ourselves will last
are our own hazard upon the shifting land
and we fear every deep shudder
will bring down some tower in a storm of mortar and glass;
yet you know these minuscule adjustments
only express the fierce inevitable desire
of continent for continent, release strain; and we must live in tents
translucent, adaptable to time and tectonics
if we hope to live

III.

It is the unnatural drainage of our deep selves that undermines;
hidden lakes silently exhausted lower mud to faithless mud;
the lateral acceleration, does it lose or gain us ground?
where She has not gestured or mumbled in Her uneasy dream
there are no mountains.

IV.

A mushroom breaks asphalt effortlessly
on its way up. roads wrinkle
daily, the scarred skin of the world
contorts, upsetting flies.
valley speaks to valley in long muttered asides
and hill to hill. conversation takes place
that you don't hear, the tight private exchange
of women alone, broken off on men's arrival;
your mother grumbles in Her sleep when you are not listening
and houses subside quietly, foundation and all.

V.

They say foundation as if it meant forever
that fragile concrete shell they lay down and lay money on;
they forget below foundation lies *fundament*
the hot black heart of things, dreaming of change
biding its time. they forget we are only sleeping
and build card towers, credit card towers, vying wildly
for height and ostentation
building on the hide of the beast that sleeps
carving their little names in it, crowing.
six inches under this broken yellow line
She sleeps; five feet under your kitchen floor,
fifty feet under the crosswalk and ten feet
under the third rail — mere epidermal measures;
no tattoo or encrustation
diverts Her slow ballet; She dances, She speaks.

VI.

You measure these changes slowly
observe, and turn away;
observe again, looking for the details
looking for the hairline crack, the two degree lean
the new ripple in the long hot street
lined with trees, where all else stays the same,
look for the detail that changes; stone is subtle
and its slow dancing subtlest of all.
under macadam, cement, chainlink, rightangle curbs
under suburbs peeled directly off the 4 by 3 print
and blue-lined down onto the patient ground
under it all, I say, we only sleep
under synthetic powder and hazardous shoes
false smiles, bent heads, weak arms
and weaker voices, under self-doubt and scars
and under a thousand masks and shopping malls I tell you
we only sleep
and we twitch and cry out in this uneasy dream.

VII.

Little men in orange coats skirmish solemnly
with the huge hunger of the old Pacific
for the long bones of the shoreline;
they can no more roll her back than keep woman from woman
pile however many stones they will, bellow orders
and manoeuvre machinery how they will,
threaten, insult, drug, beat us as they will
they do not keep us apart;
still we twitch and speak random truths
in our uneasy dream
and unplanned gates appear in all their fences.

VIII.

They have not built the sea wall nor piled the rip rap
that will keep woman from woman; it is a tide they fight
that recurs. laying out our paths
with a straight rule and a razor
still runways crack, sidewalks buckle, and weeds
push stone aside; it is a seismic activity
that goes on regardless and underground:
conversations they do not hear.

IX.

It is a standing wave that sweeps through me
the desire for you, steady as tide, fierce as tsunami
a shudder like the wave front
out from some epicenter, spreading.
as a wind hits prairie and writes in the long grasses
the signature of change —
a seismic activity, a shudder and a parting of fences
and a slow toppling of structures too brittle to endure;
the long shiver that begins and ends
in silence and the dark.
beneath the roadmap of my daily face I'm dreaming
you wake the dream in me and She twitches in my sleep
shattering concrete and diverting rivers;
the sudden changes and the slow ones
the walls that lean ponderously and fall, and the silence
and the shout of stone: She dances, She speaks.

1983

