

A. D. Thompson's

THE WOLF INCIDENT

An
Uncommune
Experience

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random places in the same spirit
of serendipity in which that this
book was written. Thank you.*

DEDICATION

With infinite gratitude to

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Catholics, Cultural Jews, Animist Moslems, Baha'is,
New Agers, Native American Churchers, Theravadan
and Mahayanan Buddhist...

Amenna!

“Language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.”

-Flaubert

PART
ONE

CHAPTER 1

I am being consumed by the green fire in the wolf's eyes. At the moment I most need my body, it betrays me. My God! I am intellectualizing a wolf attack. Its copper iron breath is on me and I am thinking of Aldo Leopold, father of ecology. He once wrote that it was a poor life that did not know fear- fear of the June lightning hitting the rimrock, setting a tree splinter humming like a tuning fork. The wolf is looking around now. What is it looking for?

Before Aldo had his farm in Sand County- he could always read nature like a book- he worked for the forestry service hunting wolves, until the day he shot a mama wolf and watched the green light go out in its eyes. That day he knew deer, wolves, mountains, men, women even, and words- all were connected in a whole greater than the sum of its parts. He founded the first wilderness in the Gila forest in New Mexico.

Perhaps I am being consumed by my own mind. My God! How can anyone intellectualize a wolf attack? Is this a wolf attack? Why won't it continue its attack then? Well, as I

lived so shall I die, I guess. I have always survived by intellectualizing. It is what I do. I am a therapist. Words are my defenses. Will they serve as weapons against a wolf?

“Shhhh, Wolfie, idz okay,” I tell the wolf, slurring the words. I always speak to him, since he was a pup and brought to us for rescue. It is difficult to speak now.

Today something went wrong. Wolfie has been sick and not eating. I cut up some meat, although we are all vegetarians on the Farm, our commune, my experiment. Normally our animals have to make do with soy and such. Wolfie is an odd exception to all our rules. He is too big to be kept but cannot be released. He is lonely. No doubt about it; he is getting mean. Today something is wrong.

I am bleeding from my leg where Wolfie bit and held me while he waited for the Alpha male to come deliver the kill bite to my neck. No Alpha male came. Wolfie is alone. What will be his next instinct?

I am oddly unconcerned. He attacked me once before. Not this bad to be sure. If I may tell the truth, however, and I suppose I may- I must- then let it be known at last that I have lost the will to live. What a cliché! Even more cliché is the reason. I have lost the ability to give life. I am menopausal.

Funny thing: I cannot get up. I thought I was just mesmerized by Wolfie’s eyes seen from ground level. Now I fear that I have fallen wrong or lost too much blood or pinched a nerve in my leg or back or neck or head or something. I cannot stand. I wondered why I felt no pain.

When I was a teacher resource on the Navajo Nation, the white Superintendent of schools gave a speech once at new teacher orientation telling us that there were some exciting new techniques coming from research on brain based learning and that we could tell which cortex the kids were

accessing- memory or creativity or whatever- by watching their eyes. What cortex is Wolfie accessing?

These brain based learning techniques were not new to anyone in the field but the superintendent. Nor were they of much use to any classroom teacher with thirty sets of eyes to scan. And they were of no use at all with Dine- or Navajo- students since those kids show respect by never looking an adult in the eye. Most teachers- almost all Anglos- call it apathy. They refuse to extend wait time after asking their inane questions even when told that the reason that a Navajo student will not answer quickly is that there are no take backs in Dine language- no easy way to apologize. Dine language is a holy rainbow tongue given to the people by

Fuck!!! Ouch- owowowow- that I can feel! Black! It is black! I am losing all feeling now. I can barely hear the chewing. I cannot feel my own heartbeat- or breathing. Am I breathing?

CHAPTER 2

Is it later?

“Can you hear me? Am I making any noise? I cannot hear anything! Wolfie, honey, go get help!!”

What was I saying? Where was I?

“You again, Douglas, my son. Just in time. I think I am going- away now. There are things I need to tell you. Come closer. I cannot see you. Hold my hand.”

It is ironic that I may be dying from loss of blood when it was the loss of my monthly loss of blood that I was grieving. If I could move my hand, or feel with my fingers, I would like to touch the trickle on my leg.

What shall I say to my only son, estranged from me now for- how many years?? Since he was seventeen, no wait- sixteen- no, no, it was seventeen. Oh, what does it matter?

Of course I know he is not really here. Where is here? In a hospital? In the morgue? On the wet ground? In Wolfie's belly?

“Dougie, my dear! I miss you! I bless you! You were a blessing to my life!!!”

That is what I want to shout. How can I explain my life in the last seconds? How can I make it better for those who remain? Oh, who am I kidding. I still want to make it better for mememe right to the end.

I want someone else to explain my life to me. What was its meaning? Strange that I should have no thoughts about the after life or lack thereof now that the question is finally pertinent. I have had so many idle opinions thereon through the years. Instead I wonder if I left the lights on in the kitchen, as if I had just gone out for bread!

Douglas loved bread as a boy. He liked crusty bread-baguette. No need cut crusts off white bread for my wonder boy. We gave him pate de foie gras and camembert instead of PB&J. Or intention was not to spoil him. We wanted to cultivate him. That is what Robert, his father, had said anyway. That was our excuse for our coldness. Our child was a project for us. We did not have him to save the marriage. The marriage was beyond saving. Did we want a pawn to argue over when we finally split? No, we wanted to stay together and suffer and we wanted an audience for our suffering. It was horribly bourgeois but we thought it was grand! Voltaire told us to cultivate our garden so we had a baby. We did not raise him candidly however. Our philosophy was anti-Panglosian. All was for the worst in the worst of possible worlds.

Then Robert left. A girl helped him go of course. I did not mind that. I was relieved to think he would have a new pet to care for him in the way to which he had become accustomed- with the same level of sympathy that I had

provided as I liked to imagine, with the same mixture of concern and malice.

The problem was when he left little Douglas with me. He was supposed to take the boy off my hands. I wanted to begin my all women commune, to test my therapeutic theories in a 'living group' of women. We had no room in the vision for kids, or at least I did not. The state saw things differently. I argued that I had had affairs myself. I claimed I was a lesbian sado-masochist but the state was unafraid. It seems the mother's rights to her child are almost inviolable. Even later as the commune got stranger and stranger I could not get Robert to sue or have me investigated.

I was stuck with Dougie. I would never tell him this of course. I did not even tell myself. But I felt stuck. No child is a dumb albatross of course. He was smart. He kept quiet. But he knew.

"You knew, didn't you, Doug?"

Some have imagined from the honesty I have come to use in describing all things- even this- that I did not love Douglas. That is untrue! I loved him soooo much that I knew I was bad for him, just as I had been for Robert. I blamed Robert but I never blamed Douglas. He was a kid! But then he got to be a teenager. This was right when we were developing our methods of honesty and we said some very truthful things to Doug. Some of the women did not like men at all. I tried to shield Doug from some of that which I felt it was not his burden to carry. But he was undoubtedly becoming a man.

"Remember I caught you experimenting with the dog?"
Why do I pathologically speak out the most embarrassing bits Doug hates?

So he went to live with his father. But he was soon back.

"To visit!" you said. That broke my heart. Tell me I did not love! You risked your father's wrath for time with me. He

had given an ultimatum, promising not to take you back in if you set one foot on the farm again in life. Yet you came. I cannot pretend it was a pleasant visit. We fought. You were a teenager. They are all buggers! And I had gotten used to my independence. I spoke my mind more after you left. All the ladies remarked it.

And I admit it was a mistake to counter ultimatum with ultimatum. When you wanted to return to your fathers and I told you never to return to the farm, did you take me seriously? I know I told you to always take women seriously. But I was upset! We all get upset. That is okay. I taught you that. Just breath before reacting. It is not simple. True, I did not accept your call later. I have always wondered if your father had not taken you back in. Probably it was just to say you had arrived safely. I trained you well. You even sent the Farm sisters a thank you note for the visit. You kissed me through them in the P.S.! Surely your father took you back. You were still a minor and someone would have called me if not, right?

I guess I will never know now. Until you die. We will be reunited! Does time work the same after death? Will I wait long? Do you have children of your own? Do not hurry to see me, my love. But it is not so bad. It does not hurt. It is just black. I wish I could tell you.

I think maybe I am not dead yet. When will someone find me? Am I already en route to hospital? I admit I am tired. Funny: I can feel tired although I cannot feel. I feel so

CHAPTER 3

The horse is so much bigger than me. I am very afraid. The bow is still on its neck. The mane is very short, in dressage style. I have been riding for a while, but now I have my very own horse! It is too big for me. Mother does not know how to pick horses! The trainer looks worried, but I just have to ride her. Wait, let me see- it is a him. Well, it used to be a him. It is a gelding. That was funny when I found out about how all that works!

“Annie, help me up will you?”

Annie looks unsure. Mom nods yes. Annie does not always do what I say. In fact she is the bossiest servant we have. But she always does what mom says. I think they pay her a lot. Annie wants to be my friend, maybe. Mom says do not make friends with the staff but I am not so sure. Annie is actually really nice. She is seven years older than me. She can ride like the wind! But she is so strict.

There are all these rules to riding horses. And it is a lot of hard work! You have to bathe and feed them and take care of the saddle and stuff. At first I was not sure I would stick

with it. Mom says I never stick with anything. But I stick with horses. I like them better than people. From the first time I rode I was hooked! Now Annie lets me run the horse and ride at a trot alone or full gallop with her on her horse by my side. I have proven myself! Take that, mom!

Maybe Annie is my friend when she says stuff like that. But I am not liking the looks of her now, taking forever checking over the horse.

“Come on!!!”

I think I will call her Whitie. My first horse!

“It is a very big horse, Mrs. Roben,” says Annie, “perhaps we should wait...”

“Maaaa,” I whine.

“It’s okay, Annie,” mother to the rescue, “I will take responsibility for the risk.”

“Very well,” Annie agrees.

Up I go with Annie’s help! She is still adjusting straps as I kick Whitie just a tad. Whitie it turns out is a nervous horse. I am little but he can feel me good. He spurts forward right away. I hold on but have to giggle.

“Wait!” Annie and mother both yell.

I give it a thought but decide I can handle him. Whitie and I have an instant bond. I pull myself up into posture and set him at a trot. He is very well trained. As soon as I feel her is in a good rhythm and responding well, I decide to go for the gallop. There is a stretch of road right heading to the track in fact. I will gallop him there- I can tell he wants to- and then wait for Annie to come and see and no doubt tell me we look okay to hit the track at a trot.

“Just a trot,” I imagine I can hear her yelling now.

Whitie runs fast! But flat- smooth- no trouble to hold on to. I feel the power underneath. It tingles all throughout the horse’s body and mine. I feel funny between my legs. It is the best feeling I have ever had. I decide to go for the track but the gate is closed. If I stop Whitie to open it the others will catch up. I don’t ever want them to catch me again. Just me and Whitie in the world!

I jump the gate. Annie has never let me jump before. Even though I won ribbons at dressage shows. I knew I was ready. Without even knowing the technique! The horse knows. Just hold on! We are rising rising. Whitie is flying. Wings unfurl on either side. I am holding on for dear life, laughing and looking down on the oval of the track. I cannot see mother or Annie or the house. We are in the clouds now. Whitie is so beautiful. He is glistening.

I notice I am wet everywhere. We are in the rain before it rains.

CHAPTER 4

It is still dark. Is there someone there?

I can no longer tell when I am dreaming. It seemed so real.

Whitie was a stupid name for the horse I admit but I was so young then, and he was my first. Soon I had a stable full. Dad outlasted mom but I never visited him. When he died I only found out because he had left me the house. I am an only child but I was surprised. He had been religious, the hypocrite. He needed forgiveness from someone I guess. I thought of refusing the house or donating it to some woman's charity. It was too far out in the country for me to keep a private practice there. My patients were city neurotics or suburbanites dreaming of being Bovary and would not drive even the four miles of our private drive let alone the highway out there.

In the end I decided to make the Virginia horse farm into an all women's commune. We were supposed to be non-hierarchical but let's face it. I was their therapist and owned all the land and house and farm and stable and car and tractor. The idea was that if I had my patients 24-7 I could

really treat them. Later when I realized what a pain they were 24-7 I changed to letting the animals heal them. We took in rescued animals and nurtured them. This in turn nurtured us into healing. We nourished ourselves and the animals with what we could grow- organic food to eat and cut flowers as a cash crop was the idea. It failed. We grew food and flowers but every year my investment kept us afloat and well fed. That is how we escaped collapsing like all the hippy communes. I was always glad I kept all the assets in my name although some called me capitalist pig. I was no guru but I was no idiot either. I kept us alive!

“I started fighting mother younger than when you started fighting me, Douglas.”

No, he is not here again!

“In fact that is why she bought me the horse, after our first fight.” I had not told mother about dad. He began interfering with me even before I began puberty. I did not think it was a big deal at first. Until I got my period! I thought dad did something wrong to me then. But would never tell mom anything. I might have told Annie but she left after I rode Whitie off. She warned she would not be responsible. But I never had hard falls. I was fine. I am a survivor. Or was. Am I alive? I think so. I don’t want to be. Anyway the new horse girl- what was her name?- and I never bonded. So I never told mom but she knew.

Mother and dad never fought. They would have to speak for that. They communicated to staff- his for the business- hers for the house- and with me through notes mainly. I still have some. I hope those are not found now.

Mother told me always wear clean underwear just in case... Now I do not even wear underwear. Ha!

But mother started in on me soon after dad. Guilt? There are as many theories as there are therapists. I think she saw me as a rival. She threw water on me at dinner one night. I ran to my room before I could be ordered there. I stayed

there longer than they would have grounded me for whatever my offense could have been. I stayed silent longer, without food longer... Only Whitie brought me out of it. I did not forgive mother. I pitied her that gesture. Kids understand more than we think, even if they do not verbalize it. No, it had nothing to do with dad. I only started hating dad after he stopped coming for me. Figure that out! Weird world, eh?...

“Why did you leave the first time, son?”

I will not say it was Mensa. I always say it was Mensa. He hates that.

“It’s complicated,” he tells me.

I cannot tell if I am dreaming. I cannot tell if he is speaking. I cannot tell if am thirsty. I can only tell that I am I. Unfortunately.

I think it was Mensa. We decided to stop using feminine products for a while. Blood was everywhere around then. It was an experiment that did not work out. We laugh about it now. Right around then Dougie left. We did not fight about Mensa though. I cannot say that. I wanted that fight.

Douglas and I were fighting for other reasons. He never said he missed his father. He understood there was another woman. I had other women too! Did he understand? He did not seem to need to understand anything except himself, his body. He wanted a basketball hoop. We got him one. Nebbishy Carol of all people played with him- her mitzvah I suppose- and I was jealous. I could not be interested in sport. Robert was so competitive he would yell every time he made a scrabble or broke 300. He said he was joyous, not competitive. I consider sports a step to war, not innocent. Robert agreed. He liked books like me. Where did our son get this love of sport?

Douglas' fantasy world had spells and swords and elven lore and poems and mysteries. He created a world nobody ever explored. We lived too far out for friends to come to play the role game Dungeons & Dragons with him. Doug said that had nothing to do with sports. Sports helped him forget the world completely. He saw nothing but a ball. He liked rules all his life. He obeyed until the day he left.

Why do men need to forget the world? My job was to prepare him to face it. I told him the myths and meanings behind fairy tales. When Sleeping 'Beauty' pricks her finger, that is a symbol for onset of menses. Fairy tales were designed to help children enter the moral world of adults. Most just tended to rope us into strict gender roles. I wanted Douglas to choose carefully, not blindly. I taught him the Jungian hero quest type script. We were even going to do a coming-of-age ceremony for him but he did not tell us what kind he wanted!

“That is why I left, okay? To avoid that!”

Why did you never ask me why your dad left? I should never have let you take his name. Ten was too soon to choose but your school needed it, they said for some official reason. Hyphens were not in vogue yet. If you had chosen your own you had been Doug Wandwielder or something!

I did not take Robert's name. That is not why he left. His name was so Jewish, he thought that is why I did not want it. He accused me of being able to pass: Roben. As if the whole damn Virginia militia county did not know the rich Jew farm on the hill the Rosen's had had for generations! They hated us even before they started having to invite us places- for profit- well before the law said so. The Law!

The Law tried to change my name. No way! I was not proud to be a Roben. Might as well be Nightingale, Raven, Wren, Turkey, Cock...

“Could be German,” your dad said!

I was not proud of Roben, not even proud of Janet- of me- but it was me, my name. I always identified with words, my words. Why should I change? Did he? He did change, later, but not his name.

I think he left rather than read Simone de Beauvoir. I read his damn Transactionalist tracts. That was his latest thing he said was his be all end all. I read it. Crap! But would he read *Second sex*? No go. He said it was the existentialism he hated, not the feminism. He did not hate women, it is true- only one: me! He loved his mother, his sister, his exes, his whores... And he hated -isms. Any but his own. He had one at a time. That's how his mind worked. When we met he was Communist. I stayed utopian socialist. He became a Behaviorist. We split over -isms. Isn't that sad? We had no heart. You had heart, Doug. I hope you still do, my dear, dear boy. I loved you for it even more than I loved you for leaving me and giving me my freedom. Your dad loved sex, someone to use or need, and adoration, any high, passion he could not himself maintain. In the end it killed him. He OD'd on cocaine. I almost came to the funeral. Just to see you though.

Who will come to my funeral?

CHAPTER 5

Wait! This is not my funeral. I am here!

How can I be at my own funeral. Am I a ghost? No, they are hugging me. I can feel!

I can see! But the coffin is closed. No headstone in sight. Whose funeral is it? We are behind the herb garden. Julie is in her colorful priestess robes. Her minister's license is from some New Age church from the back of *Rolling Stone* magazine she borrowed \$50 from me for- swore she would make money for us performing marriage ceremonies! Far as I know the only marriage she ever performed was George and Carol's- Carol and George's I should say. And that was bogus! I mean the marriage is legal. Julie's minister's license is legit. (Thank god 'ministress' is one term we are not saddled with- mainly because they do not ordain us, not because god is a woman as some say- that is one sin not pinned on us- lese majesty!) And I myself am a notary public. That is all one really needs to be married in the eyes of the state of Virginia- if it has eyes. The marriage is bogus because George is Julie's ex and is only marrying Carolina

the Spaniard to make her a U.S. citizen (god should forbid!) so she can stay with Moon, the theoretical lesbian. I say theoretical because Carolina, Carol ought to be getting married to stay with all of us, the whole Farm. F.A.R.M. stands for Females Armed with Reason and Morality. I almost left Morals out because it smacks of the good manners we women were- or are- supposed to display at all times. Note that it does not stand for Against Men as our accusers (and one of our own women once or twice I admit) have claimed.

“And what’s wrong with manners?” Angela would ask. She is from the South.

Morals means we follow precepts like the Bhikkhuni (as a Jew I always want to add a ‘m’), one of which is chastity. (We allow self-pleasure only in moderation.) Therefore Carol and Moon are not really together, technically, just like Julie doesn’t sneak off to see George all the time ‘strictly platonically’ ever since he moved his ‘pottery studio’ (apartment) nearby ‘just in case’ they questioned the marriage to Carolina.

I have to be flexible since the community is small. Moon is much younger than Carol, who initiated her into feminism and the love that dare not speak its name when Moon was studying in Spain. Carol had been a patient of mine when she was in the States studying architecture. We had stayed in contact and she wanted to join the community. Moon is the only member who had not been my patient previously. She is sweet though, too sweet.

I am intellectualizing again. Something is wrong. This is not about the wolf. There is a policeman.

“Why is there a policeman?”

“They have to investigate,” Angela stops hugging me and looks at me quizzically, “make sure it is suicide. There was no note.”

Suicide! Where is Krista? I cannot see Krista.

She was there this morning in the kitchen with me as I cut the meat to feed Wolfie.

Where is she?!

CHAPTER 6

I must have dreamed again.

“Are you there, Doug? Are you there, you who are not Doug? Am I here? Please communicate to me somehow. If you are keeping me here, stop!”

I am not in any physical pain. This is not a reason to prolong life. What is life? It is pain!

Krista was- IS- my menosister. We are going through menopause together. Unfortunately she will not accept my prescription to help her battle the depression. She says she takes some Saint John’s Wort that Julie gave her, but we all know she self-medicated with booze. She has been mentally ill for a long time. She was one of my first patients. It is hard to get her to take pills. She was shocked as a girl. We had to hospitalize her once. Normally she is not so bad. But now she is menopausal too she is borderline suicidal. I have been watching her carefully.

Her white skin is even whiter. Her red hair is thinning. Her face is pulling down. Her eyes are bright, then dull. She will not read. She has always been a great reader. I stopped giving her psych books to read. I am trying poetry, plays, novels, anything. She does not sleep. She stares at the ceiling, listens to opera. She says she feels phantom pulling below, and cramps like she is still having her period.

This morning she looked better. Was it this morning still?

“I miss Wolfie,” she said.

“Come out and feed him with me,” I said.

“Who’s on the roster for your chore partner?” We decided chores were easier done with a partner.

“Moon but she is a no show again. At George’s I bet. There will have to be a consequence.”

“You can handle it alone. You’re tough as nails.”

“I need you. You know that. Some air will do you good.” We had decided a new safety protocol also that nobody should feed Wolfie alone after he attacked me last time, bit my hand. I chose not to mention this to Krista though because she fought against the need for safety. We run on consensus but I bullied her into agreeing. Before he had been free in his yard. Now he was chained. He was getting too big to chain almost.

Krista in her typical passive-aggressive way took Wolfie off the chain sometimes and around for walks even. We complained. She cared for Wolfie a lot when he was a sick pup and often ill. She had a way with all animals. It was amazing. But if he got loose and on others, or animals...

Krista offered to care for Wolfie alone and even still do her other chores but I vetoed it. It was better for everyone to know how to do all tasks, in case one member gets ill or leaves.

“I will take a walk with you later, unless... No, nevermind, I need to go back to sleep, sorry, I had nightmares.”

Krista left me. I took the meat out. I always did Wolfie first before my other chores. It was my way, to do the unpleasant thing first. Otherwise I stayed anxious, preoccupied. I was thinking how angry I was at Julie when I entered Wolfie’s pen. How could I get her to commit to the Farm more than to George. I felt we were losing her as we had Mildred.

What does it matter now?

It matters!!! If I am gone- I think I am alive, but hope to die soon, what then will happen to the Farm? I willed it to the girls but will they stay on without me there?

Can I panic if I have no body? I can! I have a body. I felt a real flutter then- in what’s left of my guts.

CHAPTER 7

It is time to think of god. Yes, I think it is. I used to think my father was god, then the devil, then just a man. Since then it is hard for me to think of a supreme being, certainly not one who would allow a devil. Yet devils are allowed. I want to die but I do not want to want an afterlife and now that I think about it perhaps I never did want to die after all if I never thought about this. And now here I am.

What I think about it childhood- mine, Dougie's, yours. We saw things directly then. No thing was so tied up in theories yet, or laden with experience.

I feel not pain. One would think I would be happy. The reason I wanted to die was pain- sadness. Now I can feel nothing. Those who linger years with excruciating cancer or AIDS- naturally they want to die. I felt like a cheat next to

them. Am I to linger long like this? To not feel pain is worse! Who knew? Now I can go. Let's go! Let go... Why is there still so much I,I,I ego. I must not be dead.

Back to god. Okay, so I am an infamous feminist. I have been asked many times if god is female. No. There, are you happy. God if it exists cannot possibly be gendered any more than it could have one race. The ones we invent ourselves, or anthropomorphize – they don't count. I am talking about tree spirits, the mountain. I am talking about air. Can I still breath? Surely I would feel that? They say it is involuntarily controlled. But I got the wind knocked out of me once- fighting a man in the street. He whistled at me. It was silly. I was young. I wanted to fight violence with smarts, but my sarcasm failed me and his bravado endured.

Where is god? Cannot stay in mind.

Wait a minute. I have to do my chores.

MORNING CHECKLIST

Yoga/Benedictions!
Turn on office fax
Brew coffee
Check phone messages/email
Check Breakfast Duty List-
Cook, Serve, Clean Up
Bring in dry laundry
Feed Wolfie
Feed horses
Milk Canibella
Distribute meds

10/30

Pay water bill TODAY!
meeting with farm co-op rep.
Session with Moon 10am

*Check that Julie feeds house animals (cats, fish, iguana)
and pond waterfowl (confront her RE; no shows/George?)

Get lightbulbs

Call accountant

Volunteer mentor orientation at elementary 3:30

Fix sewing machine

Paint patio furniture

Finish mix tape for Mildred

Write Krista's eulogy

Today is a light day.

Wait!

Write Krista's eulogy?!

CHAPTER 8

I must have been dreaming again. I could see!

Angela could always be a little harsh with Krista. No doubt Angry Angie will take over now I am gone.

Of course she is Southern sweet to your face! And her race lets her get away with a lot. It is true she has suffered though. She was middle class black, attended prep school, college, was my student aide briefly interning for her Masters in Social Work, then quit it, then was my patient, then quit me.

I was surprised to see her back at the Farm one day. Of course she had read about us. The Journal did a big article, mostly laudatory. Angela was beaten up. She was in a shelter. Krista mistakenly assumed drugs and tried to sympathize. That was a mistake!

“I will have you know I have never used drugs in my life, ma’am and I will thank you to keep your own experiences to yourself- for your own good!”

Even cutting Angela was polite. She gave advice freely and stifled you with her interest when it suited her.

Krista slunk away. She was fragile.

I was torn to stay with Angela or go help Krista. Angela is tough but she looked pretty beaten, and she was holding a little dog.

Normally we do not take dogs because there is a dog rescue lady in town. And they are a lot of trouble. But this dog was the albatross that kept her going back to her abusive (white Harvard man) husband time and again. The shelter would not take Buster Keaton in, it seems. So we did.

Angela just came along. She told me she would not stay long. She said she did not want sessions. I said they were pro bono, and she should stay as long as she liked. We needed her- that’s true. We were a pretty little rich white girl club and we all knew it.

It was Angela who said we had better chain up Krista if she would not keep Wolfie on a chain. Wolfie had eaten Buster Keaton. Angela said she did not mean it and was joking more than upset. And for once I do not think the words reached Krista. Men gossip as much as women—worse, they do so in print. It is human nature, has uses, and is destructive. I try to tell the women to confront one another directly- that way they are more careful. Poor thought leads to poor words leads to poor acts leads to poor livelihood leads to poor practice... And if a conflict escalates they should get me or another to mediate directly- all in roon- no go between. Philip Roth tells the story of losham hora or bad words and that if the whole world could go but one day with nobody uttering one, the kingdom of god would be immediately manifest on earth. We were far from it on the Farm, let me tell you!

Angela came to me to tell me not to cut the meat before going to feed Wolfie, that the blood on my hands contributed to the last attack- and I think she was right but the procedures were in place and I never remembered to cut the meat the night before when it was my turn.

Mildred?

Oh she was a member who left. One of my patients anyway I managed to heal. Now another is dead! Krista, oh my sweet sweet menosister Krista. Why?!

Will I see you soon? Did you come to keep me company. Which one of us will arrive first and where? What method did you use? I hope not pills like last time. They will take my license! Joke!! Maybe that is why you always let Wolfie run free- to hurt you. Did you care that he would hurt me?! Did you just want to be free yourself? Did you want me to be free too?

Where ARE you???

CHAPTER 9

It must be someone's birthday. I cannot see the cake. It seems always to be behind a column. There is a mirror but it multiplies the columns. Perhaps there are many cakes. I realize I am eating some. Then I look at myself in the mirror. It is not me. But I have a nice paper hat. I am a boy about four. It is my birthday I think.

I am now remembering my presents: lego bricks, Lincoln logs, a big wheel, matchbox cars, playmobile people, a He Man Castle Greyskull, plastic toy soldiers, a miniature zoo, a GI Joe European style big as Barbie with uniform and gadgets, a Chinese checker set, a big wheel trike, operation the game, marbles, a kite, a yo-yo, two books: a Hardy Boys and something about some Great Brain, Beano comics, a box of chocolates, an ugly sweater, a stuffed Pooh bear, a toy drum... It goes on. I cannot decide which is my favorite.

We are playing on the stairs. I can jump up six and land on my feet without falling backwards, but there is a girl who can do seven. Her mother calls her away before I can challenge her to a rematch and best her. I am mad!

Someone spilled punch and I sat in it and am crying because my father yelled at me for it, then laughed it off like it was nothing.

I am nothing.

I am painting a picture. It is black and white.

I suddenly realize the whole world is black and white.

Then I begin to remember: I am nothing.

I cannot see.
I cannot feel.

I am not sure I can breath.

I am undead.

CHAPTER 10

This is my best memory from the Farm:

“Doug, I want you to hear this, to remember this for me, remember something good we did, in my life.”

It was my birthday. Angela had recently joined us and reinstigated the vegetarianism debate. She said that she had no problem dropping meat and eating vegetables. The South had the best vegetables, she claimed proudly! But it all depended on the lard.

It reminded me of when Julie had first joined us. She was very new age and refused to cook from cookbook, although we had them all from Betty Crocker to Moosewood. This style of cooking eventually worked for her as she seasoned to taste and was very creative at combining whatever ingredients we had lying around in abundance- sometimes odd things like piles of leeks and pounds of kasha.

In the beginning she had some troubles because she was not used to cooking for so many and she insisted that most vegetarians- and she counted herself one- needlessly sacrificed flavor, and that it was this which turned people off more than missing meat. We all need flavor. There was no reason to throw spices and sauces out with the eggs and butter!

Her first creation was a basic tofu chili that failed to wow. Our homegrown chilies which she had sampled sent her retching to the sink they were so strong so she put just a few in, but being unable to taste thereafter she did not realize that the chili turned out ironically bland. It was sad to tell her but we had to.

The next time she made a white based mushroom stew and overcompensated with black pepper. You can imagine that in a hard working environment like ours with no snack foods allowed, the leftovers do not last long usually. But that stew which someone cruelly labeled “black pepper stew from hell” (we dated each dish on scotch tape when we put it in the fridges since we had to follow Virginia Board of Health food safety laws like any hotel restaurant would) and that stew sat in the fridge for weeks mocking poor Julie until I took mercy and threw it out.

She solved the problem eventually and has been cooking great food for us ever since- all without recipes. She made a tempeh teriyaki one time that was divine marinated all night in lavender honey and fresh ginger root shavings!

On the occasion of my birthday she decided to make the cake. She had decided that the problem why she was not a baker was that she did not experiment at it like she did with cooking- because baking took so long. But in fact what she needed to do was just get in there and mix it up and right away she started a batter. Unfortunately there is a bit more science involved in baking and the cake turned out like a stone.

“Why is it black?” asked Caorl.

“What’s wrong with black?” asked Angie.

“Well, it’s just not a common cake color, is it?”

“The cake itself is often black, covered with white icing like saccharine Elvis covering the Blues!”

“It’s the sesame powder I used to make the frosting,” Julie explained to stop the mock argument.

“It’s delicious,” said Carol, running a finger along the base and to her tongue.

“You’re delicious,” said Carol.

“Hey, that’s my cake you’re sullying,” I pretended protest. Julie tried to cut the cake. The tofu ice cream was melting. She could not do it. Angela brought in a cleaver and handed it to me. I attacked the cake but barely made a dent. In the end we licked that solid block clean of the really quite delicious black icing.

I think that moment may have been one of the purest moments of joy I ever felt. For years after Robert left, and then Doug so that I can never sort them out in my mind, I secretly missed my family but would not admit it to myself. With the girls at the Farm for the first time I had a new family so complete that I did not once that entire time think of any of Robert’s birthdays and how we fought when forced to spend time together or of the guilt I always felt on Dougie’s birthday no matter how good a job I did.

“Let’s play that game where you have to pop a balloon between your knees,” Moon suggested.

She was overruled by her elders who opted for coffee and conversation on the patio, watching the sun set, and a game of truth without the dares.

Moon grew up vegetarian and Unitarian Universalist. It was all new to Carolina who grew up Catholic and eating carne. In fact she missed both, but she could not forgive the pope insisting she both love penis and not protect herself.

Carol told a story about the first potluck she attended at the Unitarian Universalist church. It was really quite pleasant with folk music and theology all over the map. But when she first arrived with a veggie couscous she was proud of, she was told to take it into the kitchen.

At that time she did not know a Vegan from a Wiccan. She thought Unitarian Universalists must be some kind of cult. She met a long gray-haired old man in the kitchen stirring a pot of gray gloop. She asked what it was.

“Seitan,” he answered and she dropped her bowl sending couscous grains and zucchini rounds all over the kitchen. She did not then know that seitan was a wheat gluten meat substitute.

We laughed. Moon said it was strange that most vegetarians when they lapse do not nibble a bite of shrimp or salmon. Her old girlfriend one day in a deli out of the blue ordered a bagel and hotdog! Next day she was a vegan!

“That’s nothing,” said Angie, “my vegetarian friend- she was one for years too, not an experimenter- anyway, we got drunk on margaritas at a Mexican restaurant and passed out. Later that night I went looking for my leftover greasy beef tamale and never did find it, but my friend was in the bed groaning and holding her stomach. I helped her to the bathroom to be sick and out came my tamale! She stayed a meat eater after that though, oddly enough, but she quit drinking. I guess it was one vice at a time for her!”

“Apropos,” I asked with some trepidation, “there have been lots of groans lately about keeping the precepts and I cannot imagine another year of acting the enforcer if people are not

committed to them. I believe in them a lot, but would not have you do it for me, so if we need a meeting tomorrow to discuss lessening one or some, then let us get it over with.”

“Honey,” said Angela, and she spoke with everyone, “I would give up more than meat and men for you but I do it for your ideas which I believe in too. We are with you one hundred million percent!”

CHAPTER 11

I get to the front of the line at last and look up at the menu board. I order a Number Two Cheeseburger Combo super sized with coke.

“Wait a minute! I don’t eat meat,” I tell an oily white trash slip of a teenaged girl in a greasy bright uniform.

“Why are you a vegetarian?” she asks.

“None of your business,” I protest, scanning the board for non-meat items. There appear to be none.

“It is all my business. Is it not ironic that I had you eaten by a large creature? I usually let the tiny ones deal with your kind.”

I stared at the girl’s face. She seemed sincere. Then I read her nametag. It read: “God”

I said nothing.

“The problem is your kind have no sense of scale,” She continued, “so you step on bugs without a thought. If you massacre many at once I sometimes visit you with a virus or other bacteria to get you to pay attention to the little lives. As God of course I do not play favorites. Long, short, tall, tiny- all the same to Me. Mostly you kill bugs here and there indiscriminately and each time I let a tiny cell in- cancer- or smaller things- and they accumulate slowly. You have been careful with the smallest creatures and therefore I have allowed you to be killed by a larger creature- an honor- the honor of the wolf.”

I thought of my question at last. I had thought before what I would ask god if I met him and all I could ever think was a number like forty or two.

“I read an interview once with a writer,” I said, “in which they asked her why she writes. She said that you had might as well ask God why he created the universe. Why did you create the universe?”

“None of your business,” said God.

CHAPTER 12

The women are gathered at the big table in the dining room. There are mugs out, empty, and a chess set. Krista is not there of course and neither is Angela. I get worried and go looking for Angela. I find her upstairs on the phone. She is talking to her mom. She is crying

“I tried to warn her, mom!”

Right away I know they are talking about me.

“I did not do all I could. Krista was off her head. She never locked Wolfie up. Frankly, I hate to speak ill of the dead but Janet was not giving her the care she needed. Krista never took her pills any more. Poor Krista!”

“Thanks, ma, no I will stay here. They need me- now more than ever. To Janet I was just a token. She always said. See we have diversity. See we have an African-American. Do not ask me why a Latina and two lesbians were not

enough for her! She was proud to I think that I was abused. I was a symbol to her. But to the others I am a leader. Lord knows I never threatened her role, ma, non-hierarchical my ass!”

“Sorry, ma.”

“I know I was not raised to talk like that. But if ever there was a time. Two deaths! There were only five of us to begin with, unless you count George who is over here half the time, not supposed to stay the night but he does. We will need new members of course but I think we should stay with Janet’s ideas- most are good in theory if not in practice- and I definitely think men should stay out! But we cannot afford to loose Julie at this point.”

“Yes, I think she would stay loyal. But she so loves George. It is like a drug. I do not know how Moon and Carol do it. I think they keep mainly celibate, for reals. I think Moon never much cared for Carol’s old body to begin with...”

“Sorry. Look, I know you don’t like to hear about it but it is part of life, my life. The world turns, mom. Well, maybe not in Oppopolacha!”

“There will be an investigation. Krista’s letter I think solves most of it. Julie was supposed to be with her. We put some safety procedures in place. But I told Janet to cut the meat up the night before. You cannot go into a wolf’s pen dripping with blood. How can poor Wolfie distinguish? You would think she would have learned from last time! I think subconsciously she did not change because it was me who warned her. She cannot take direction from me. I should have stayed silent like she secretly likes. But she says speak up, said.”

“No, you’re right. She did have a hard time accepting new ways. She was a creature of habit. Routine was part of her methodology. I believe in that. Good habits of mind create good automatic responses. We are slaves to our bad habits half the time. Break the chains!”

Angie began to sob. Perhaps she was right about my not listening to her.

“Thanks, I gotta go, mom. I love you too. Yes, I will go to bed. Just want to say goodnight to the ladies.”

I think I am dreaming again. I can see. But I just had a dream. I feel tired. I feel! I feel like letting go of the I.

CHAPTER 13

My god! The finances. I should have changed my will. I left everything to Douglas! Of all the bad luck to die before the meeting with the accountant.

I should have left it all to Angela!

The Farm will go bankrupt...

CHAPTER 14

Julie sneaks out of the house and gets on her bicycle to go to George's studio apartment. Instantly we are there.

She is in his arms as soon as he opens the door.

"I am so sorry," he says. He has heard.

"It is all my fault!" she screams.

"What? No! God, why?"

"I was supposed to be her partner, her back up. I was supposed to be there this morning. We were laying around drinking coffee and reading in bed and she was being eaten by a wolf! It is too horrible!!"

"There was no way to know."

“Yes, there was, George. Janet said: good habits create good results and our bad habit, mine- of breaking curfew, sneaking out, staying away- it finally caught up to me- no, to her- the consequence! And here I am again, like a thief in the night. I wanted to ride my bike into an oncoming car on the way over here.”

“God, do not do that!” George pleaded. It was clear from his distress he had never wished me ill, never wished the Farm to fail. He was in fact happy the way we all were. He liked his little bit of independence. Now Julie would rely on him more than ever.

“Listen,” he explained, “Janet would not blame you. She was not into blame. And she would not want you to hurt yourself. One is enough! One is too much!” He meant Krista.

But I did blame her. I blamed her for the demise of the Farm more than for my death. I blamed her for her love. I know she loved me. That is obvious now. But the truth is I wanted her dead too!

I had often wanted my clients to die. They were a burden to me. Secretly I empathized with George. He had his art. What did Julie have? She was a sycophant and a parasite. I hated weakness- in others, in myself. It was something I had noted many times about myself. I did not like it. Yet it continued. Even now. One more thing it would be nice to shuck off with this mortal coil.

“Death, where is thy sting?!” I could almost hear myself shouting it. Were there many things I would have wanted to shout at the moment of death? What is that bad joke about excrement, last words, and genie wishes? Who cares? Nuns at the pearly gates. IT is all scatological. Freud associated feces with gold and money.

There are people I wish I had given a piece of my mind to throughout the years of course, but my bigger regrets are those who I gave a piece I cannot take back. In my Buddhist phase I got some peace from meditating on equanimity as well as peace.

Take the face of your enemy. Put it in your mind. Age it. Add weight, wrinkles. Abandon fear. See your enemy feeble. Now reverse the process. Shrink your enemy to an infant. Round it out. Add innocence. Feel love for it.

Now do the same for your friends. Only take them further- to the place before life, and after death. Do it for family, lovers, bosses, world leaders, world destroyers, gods...

They say Goethe's last words were "mir licht!" More light!

I have often wondered if it was a call for Gott as some have said, or if in fact he just wanted a lamp brought to inspect a corner of the room.

He also said that nothing human was foreign to him. Did he mean incest, rape, necrophilia?

CHAPTER 15

I no longer think that these are dreams. I am not sure I am alive.

Carol and Moon are curled up in bed together. Moon is crying. Carol is holding her like a mother.

Of all of them I think Carol was, is the most like me. She intellectualizes.

Or is it just that she does not care at all?! Stop that kind of thinking!

“We should have warned her!” Moon says.

“Do not start blaming yourself,” says Carol.

She is not! She is blaming you, idiot!

“You always said she was in danger” Moon continued.
“You said that Krista wanted to die at all costs. You said Janet was in her way. We should have warned Janet! I never dreamed she would take Janet with her! I just figured you would eventually tell Janet, she would minimize as always, you would insist, the two of you would fight, maybe Krista would go to an institution, maybe not. But I never thought... Ugh!” Moon dry heaves.

Carol is rubbing her back, “Honey, listen, Janet never listened to us. I was useless my trying. But it is past. Now, remember when my mom died and I thought it would never sun again, all colors would grey forever. I could not even taste! Remember?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Well, we are there again- together this time- and we will face it together and we will survive it together, and we will make meaning of it eventually.”

“I don’t know.”

“Listen,” Carol continued, “I know that you don’t know, nor do I. But one thing you need to know. I joder love you. O lov yo, hono!!”

They had invented a language –stopodoz- with ‘o’ as the only vowel. It was childish and Carol after the first blush wore off the rose, retired the regression,. Moon sometimes tried to rekindle it. Carol resisted. This was a concession now.

“o-ko,” Moon smiled wanly.

“It is tragic of course for Janet but for Krista I think she wanted to go- so she should go. She took Janet with her so maybe that was best too, no? I mean, will Janet want to survive it, the death of her friend and patient in her care. I like to think now Janet is there with Krista to care for her.”

What did they mean Krista ‘took’ me with her? What does it mean.

“Carol, I love you. You always find a positive way to see everything.”

“Misery may love company but so does joy and I love you. You know the story of Buddha and the mustard seed?”

“No.”

“Moon, what did those hippy parents teach you. They say they are Indian religion, Celtic, Hindu. They are nothing! This woman became a famous disciple of Buddha. Never mind the name. She came first because her only child is died. She ask the Buddha to bring him back.”

“Did he?” Moon asked excitedly, then scowled.

“He told her okay he can do it with only one mustard seed- that is a tiny thing too like nada in the cooking- but she must find it in a casa who never knew death before!”

“And?”

Carol paused a long time, choked up.

“Honey?”

Carol continued, “Well the woman went from house to house each time asking did anybody in that house died? Each time the answer is the same: yes. In every house somebody had lost a family member- child, brother, sister, parent, grandparent, or a pet maybe...”

They both laughed.

“So the lady returned to the Buddha and said okay, I accept it now. My son is dead. He is not coming back.”

The two women embraced weeping openly, copiously.

Janet realized she had not cried for herself yet. Could she cry? Then she realized she had not cried for Krista. Had Krista cried for her, before she died. When had she died? How? Where was she now?

Carol and Moon had been holding the note- the suicide note. Perhaps it explained more.

CHAPTER 16

I, Krista VanHolt, being of unsound mind and babyless body, hereby declare this my last will and testament. This is also my confession. I murdered my best friend. This morning I went down to the kitchen. I had hardly slept all night as usual. I saw Janet Roben there. She was supposed to feed our wolf today. He is my wolf really but we have to pretend to share everything here even though Janet owns everything in reality. She wants to pretend. She did ask me to help her since her partner was not there. I declined.

The reason that I declined is I was tired. But in the back of mind I know that I knew: Janet's hands were bloody, she was alone, I had left Woolfie unchained. I knew all of this and I even knew what might happen, what would happen. It did and I heard it happen but I stuffed my head under a pillow. I was just too tired to go out there. That's it. I went back to sleep. I slept!

Janet was killed and eaten by the wolf. But that is not why I am killing myself. I had given my life to Janet already and she would not let me go. She owed me! There was only one worthwhile thing I could have done with my life meanwhile, other than rot here, and that thing I cannot do. I could have had a baby. It is a miracle in every woman. But I hated men. No, not men. I like men. I hated sex. I did it once and it was foul and violent. Never again!

While we sit here in our little matriarchy in the sky, our tower where we grow our hair and our thorns so no prince can come, we miss out on the very thing that most makes us a woman- childbirth. I wanted to try the new methods when I read them. They can invitro fertilize you now without having to touch a man. I wanted to. I wanted a baby so. But Janet said no children on the Farm. For once I took a stand. It went to vote and they sided with her. My only family now that my birth family disowned me for living in a 'disgusting dyke cult' and now they too turned their back on me, me and my baby, my life, my right to give life. I did not have the courage to go it alone. I could not even live without these women let alone raise a baby without them, without a father, without my own family, alone.

Now it is too late. I can no longer have babies. They tell me now I could have given an egg to be preserved. It is too late. There is nothing I can do. I cannot give life so I took life and now I take my own.

May the Goddess have mercy on us all!

CHAPTER 17

The voice of god again, the teenager, fast food clerk:

“You got it wrong. I never said it was none of your business!”

Huh?

“You asked me why I created the world. I said because I was bored one day.”

Oh.

CHAPTER 18

I am remembering the first time I met poor Krista. She came in for an introductory session. I made my opening remarks about confidentiality and mandatory reporting and patient preferences and how they may mismatch the therapist's style and there were no hard feelings, nothing personal if it did not work out. I usually left the discussion of fees and that side of the business until the second session if there was one, unless the client brought up the subject of course.

I do not think Krista heard a word I was saying. She was fixated on some man she had seen in the waiting room. She did not dare ask but I pressed her. Clearly something was on her mind!

At that time I shared office space with a dentist. The man in question had been ripping up pages of poetry it looked like after making tiny notes on sticky notes about each one. The tearing bothered her and she asked him to stop. He just

continued heedlessly. She insisted and he stopped, smiled, and asked her to join him for coffee after his cleaning.

What appalled her apparently was that he was the dentist's patient and not mine. I mean, here was a man who clearly needed analysis if anybody did! He was much worse than her.

I assured her that seeking therapy was a healthy thing and perhaps the man was not ready although it was not really useful to speculate on the mental health of others. Perhaps he had a therapist (in fact he did- me!- and he had lied to her) or perhaps he never would. The world was full of all types. I tried to say all this nonchalantly.

Krista was very upset about it and began to cry and from there we began our work together. We were together many years both learning from one another. We developed a trust I thought but somewhere I knew it had been eroded. She no longer spoke to me although I spoke to her more and more as menopause came. I needed her and it seemed the more I needed her the less he heeded me.

Perhaps the change came when Mildred left. She and Mildred were friends. It was Mildred who finally convinced Krista that it was crazy not to come see a shrink if she was miserable all the time! After all it did wonders for her, Mildred. But Mildred was only neurotic and rich and I am not sure I did wonders for her. Krista was mentally ill and needed a lot of help to function reasonably contentedly with minor and occasional problem periods.

Then the two of them had a falling out. I may never know now what it was about but I saw them have it out.

"I will not compete with you, Krista!" Mildred yelled.

"You will do as I say," said Krista calmly.

"Enough! If you keep this up I will have no choice but to leave. I mean it this time. Enough!"

“You would never. You have money alright but you need friends. We are all you have. You had nobody before you met me. Your high so so-called friends called you stupid and you yelled at them like you are me now but that does not play with that set, eh? They left you. Where will you go? Give it up!”

In the morning Mildred was gone. No note. We never got a letter either. We sent many. I begged Krista to reconcile and she said she hated me for that. Someone eventually got Mildred on the phone and we have spoken since then but she never spoke to Krista again.

CHAPTER 19

“Is it not true that in fact you offered my client a biscuit from your basket if you know what I mean?”

The speaker was an owl in a white wig. In the witness box was a red-headed girl.

“That is a lie! I was in a hurry to get to grandmother’s house. She is sick. Her eyes are yellow.”

“Then how,” the barrister queried, “do you ho ho account for the fact that that man in the corner there, Little Jack, will testify that he saw you speaking with the woof, hood lowered on more than one occasion.”

“Objection, you honor,” intervened a fox in white wig, “heresay, calls for speculation.”

“Sustained,” intoned Judge Crow, “the witness may step down.”

“But he is in love with me,” said Red, “and insanely jealous. He might say anything. Why...”

“Enough,” interrupted Owl.

“Next witness,” cawed Crow.

“I call Georgie Porgie,” Fox articulated.

A rotund but robust young man stepped up in a checked outfit.

“What is your occupation, please, sir?” asked Fox.

“I is a baker, thank you, yes, sir, if it please the court.”

“Objection: relevance?” cooed Owl.

“Sustained. Proceed.”

“Red Robin gave me a kiss! Little Boy Blue saw it! She is a tart. I seen her with the woof, many times. They uses her grandmother what died this month, uses her house for meetings like.”

“Meetings of what nature?” Fox grinned.

“Of a Biblical nature, sir,” George turned red.

“For Bible study?!” Fox blustered.

“No, no, it is I mean a euphemismajiggie. I mean they meet in the flesh, carnal like, your honor, for love.”

“At this juncture, we move for immediate dismissal and to file counter suit against the clearly speciesist woodcutter who assumed woof-girl love could not be consensual.”

“Hold!” hooted Owl. I have character witnesses who will prove that Mr. Woof is a violent creature who needs to be destroyed before he feeds again!

“Produce them then,” Raven ordered.

The wide wooden doors at the back of the court were thrown wide to admit... nobody!

No wait. There they are down there. I almost did not see them they are so small. Three piglets!

“We can produce the deeds to the land. Those three are squatters on my client’s land. Mr. Woof is a pillar of this community, a contributor, a landowner, a burgher... I object most strenuously.”

“Everyone sit down!” Raven squawked.

Woof pounced on him and ate him and laughed with feathers flying out his mouth. The pigs ran, Owl flew, the boys too, only Fox and the girl stayed. They knew.

CHAPTER 20

Dear Interested Person,

Thank you for your interest in F.A.R.M. We are pleased to welcome all female guests with a reservation easily obtained at the number below. Guests may stay free of charge for up to two weeks provided they complete the work tasks and get to know you forms and activities consistently. We do not accommodate children, substance abuse, violence of any form (including self-mutilation), or men. Men may contribute to our Non-Profit at the address below.

The Farm was founded over a decade ago by Jungian psychotherapist Dr. Janet Roben as an experiment in living and treatment. Residents agree to follow a course of analysis with Dr. Roben and attempt to follow the agreed upon methodologies, all of which tend the nurturing of the woman, her body, and the world. Nobody is perfect and since straying is common, we appreciate Janet's gentle

guidance back to the precepts. Consequences are always personal and ad hoc but there has now been accumulated a wealth of experience and some guidelines can be given to newcomers during orientation.

The core of Dr. Roben's philosophy of care deals with interpersonal communication, listening well and speaking with honesty and without expectation. Morality is also important. Residents abstain from intoxicants, narcotics, meat, and sex. An additional feature is the promotion of self-love though nurturing of the other. In the case of the Farm we care for rescued animals.

We support ourselves by growing what we need, living simply, and some cottage industry, mainly artisanal. We own the land not in common but with the understanding that Janet who holds the deed holds it in trust for all of us. She inherited the land from her parents and expanded the Farm and buildings. She also has a car which is at our disposal (usually for Farm errands but an occasional outing), as well as a tractor!

We look forward to welcoming you for a visit!

In Sisterhood,
F.A.R.M.
Reception
Committee

P.S. On the next page you will find the answers to some frequently asked questions.

DIRECTIONS IF DRIVING FROM D.C.:

FAQ

1. Can I keep my own bank account?

As a visitor, yes. As a resident, no. All assets are legally donated to the Farm upon swearing in. We offer full medical and dental insurance to all residents.

2. Can I date outside the Farm?

No. There is no dating in or out.

3. Can my family visit me there?

Family or friends can visit one week per year for the holiday of your choosing or your birthday, or you may go visit them for one week a year.

4. What kind of work will I do?

You will do farm work as well as household chores as well as some office work for a total of forty hours per week.

5. What do you do for fun?

We sing, we cook, we play board games, we sip tea and chat, we take long walks, go swimming in the pond, stargaze, and generally laugh and love one another.

6. What problems do you have?

Like any community we have internal strife. Usually this revolves around accumulated small slights about noise, cleanliness, chores. We mainly share politics. Religious

debate is lively but generally civil. We do not have any external conflicts. The women work things out themselves over time or quite quickly, or get mediation from Janet.

7. If I have a special skill can I contribute it?

Of course. But it will be above and beyond your forty hours unless you can convince the whole Farm that your new contribution benefits everyone equally and substantially, not just materially. We do not allow anyone to work part time or on contract or as a consultant outside of the Farm. The only exceptions are for writers and artists and musicians. All decisions are always by consensus.

8. What if later on I want to leave?

No problem! Just have your friends or family pick you up and we will wish you well, sad to see you go unless you were a disruption to others (we have asked one person to leave before). Unfortunately, as you can imagine, we are not wealthy enough to pay you any kind of severance nor can we allow you to save up for any reason so you will have to rely on your external support there.

9. What kind of person enjoys life on the Farm?

In general our residents are independent women with a strong interest in women's issues and a desire to deepen their understanding of their own psyche. Some praise God. Most are highly educated, but not all. We are international and multicultural. We welcome all races and creeds. Alas we cannot accommodate special needs at this time (with some exception for mild mental illness). Our politics tend to be green, and left of center. A caring attitude and a sense of humor are the key ingredients with work ethic and flexibility flowing right behind. See you soon!

10. If I do not come visit, how can I still donate?

See details and address below. (F.A.R.M. is a tax-deductible legally registered non-profit organization. Write the number below on your check and keep it for your records. Receipts issued only upon special request.) Thank you!

CHAPTER 21

Iaeurgpiqubg!!!!

Douglas, cover your ears.

Mother Fucker !!!

What have those bitches done to me?? Now I am in limbo. The Farm is in limbo. Krista is dead. Julie is half out with George. Only Carol practically remains with her little Moon child in tow for whatever she is worth. Then there is Angie poised to take my place and my body is not even cold yet!

Or is it?

All of them could have prevented this:

Krista unchained Woolfie and watched it all happen practically!

Julie betrayed me for a man, failed to back me up as per protocol, left to me die alone!

Carol and Moon let me go out there time and again my hands covered in blood just asking for it! (Oh, my god! Look what I just said: 'asking for it'. I am blaming the victim! The victim is me! I refuse to feel sorry for them.)

Only Angela tried to talk to me but she got me so twisted around I almost had to go against whatever she said. Just like she said. Ugh.

Fuck them all.

I curse them. I hope I can stay and haunt them forever...

CHAPTER 22

So this is the hospital room. No wait, this is a dream. I can see again. Or am I coming out of it? No my eyes are closed. How can I see that? I am inside me!

Can I move? Yes I can feel movement but the body stays put. The rest oozes, floats, drifts? I cannot control it. The body keeps calling it back.

A nurse is talking to me. Let me turn up the volume.

“What’s your name, honey?”

“Roben, Janet Roben.”

“Occupation?”

“I am a therapist.”

“Really? That must be interesting.”

“It’s okay. You don’t have to try to establish rapport.”

“Seriously,” the nurse smiles- is he flirting with me?- “are you a psychoanalyst or social worker or psychiatrist or neurosurgeon or what? Private practice?”

“I have a house. I call it a full-way house. I work there with a half dozen permanent female residents.”

“Wow! Date of birth?”

“March seventh, do I have to say the year?” Am I flirting?
He is young. Where is he from? Southeast Asia?

“Actually I got it on your intake form here. Medical history?”

“Yes. I have history.”

“Sorry. Let me just make it through the form quick as we can. It’s routine, a couple personal questions, no big deal, okay?”

“Okay,” I want to believe.

“Do you or any person in your family have a history of:

Polio?”

“No.”

“Mental illness?”

“No.”

“Lumps or lesions?”

“No.”

“Cancer?”

“Uncle. Thyroid.””

“Diabetes?”

“No.”

“Meningitis?”

“No.”

“Hepatitis?”

“No.”

“Seizures”

“No.”

“Epilepsy?”

“No.”

“Scoliosis?”

“No.”

“Respiratory Problems?”

“No.”

“Tuberculosis?”

“No.”

“Sexually Transmitted Disease?”

“No.”

“HIV/AIDS?”

“Hearing problems?”

“No.”

“Wolf attack?”

“Huh?”

“Date of Death?”

|

CHAPTER 23

The farm is one hundred and two acres of lovely green hills and deciduous forest.

There is a small brook and over that brook a little bridge we built on Summer painted red. The brook leads into a spring house which keeps things- fruit mainly- surprisingly cold. Some watermelon I ate in that spring house one June afternoon may now I can definitively say have been the best thing I ate in my too short life.

At one point a giant weeping willow stands on one side of that brook before the forest. Under the willow we made a make shift see-saw with boards tied over a barrel. It is surprisingly fun even for big folk and any children who ever visited us loved it. There were a few such visitors but not enough. Not for lonely Doug I imagine.

Beyond the willow is a place where the brook which is really quite shallow- up to knees or waists- turns wide and carves into the mud on one side to make a little swimming hole- more of a sitting hole really.

My favorite place is a big old tree, twisted, dead probably, on the edge of the forest, covered in blackberries. I could sit in that tree for hours as a girl, even as a woman, eating blackberries. By the road there is honeysuckle one could snack on as well.

Doug was never interested in these places but the neighbors grew corn and he loved to run in the corn rows. Also in the forest he had a rock climbing place he would slide down. Angie's favorite place in the woods is a fern grove with deep moss under one tree she would lie on.

Work wise we have a modest vegetable garden (zucchini always comes in more than we can stand for some reason) and a very good herb garden and grow flowers and have a few desultory fruit trees, the fruit from which we jam and can.

The best time on the farm is night. The stars are amazing and we have a fire pit. Roast potatoes from the fire is a favorite food on the farm. The worst time on the farm is mosquito season, especially by the pond. Fireflies come in summer however and are slow and easy to catch.

I am a firefly I suppose who has not been caught and am in a jar without escape waiting to extinguish.

Can a firefly extinguish itself?

A snake once bit Moon down by the pond and we were concerned about it but it turned out to be some non-poisonous snake. Julie said she caught Moon and Carol at it in the forest one time but we decided to let it go in silence.

Wild animals actually usually keep a distance from our kept animals. Our cats are good mousers and also bring in the carcasses of various rodents, vermin, marsupials, and other assorted small mammals, as well as all sorts of winged creatures. The dog, when we had one, chased larger game but never caught any. Nor did any predators bother our chickens or ducks, thankfully.

For a while we were caring for a ferret. I put it on a string and liked to take it walking. It had so much nervous energy it scared me a bit and I thought I must conquer that fear. The ferret escaped.

A hawk we once nursed back to health was later shot very nearby. Our neighbors if they know about us do not know what to make of us. We usually go to the city rather than stop in the local town much.

Our road is not paved and sometimes was not passable in bad weather. We are on the grid but have a back-up generator and our own septic tank of course.

That is the farm.

CHAPTER 24

“What the hell have you done?!” I remember definitely cursing.

Krista blanched. She knew what she had done.

“Why? We would have supported you. I mean I knew you wanted to write, but this?” I threw the magazine at her.

The crinkled pages, wet with tears, in the *Journal of Intentional Communities* were a two page spread with the title “Female Leadership Patterns: An Old Paradigm” with pull out quotes from Angela Garnier and author Krista Albright. Words were circled, starred, cross out, whole sections highlighted, one page badly torn. My eyes must have been puffy from a sleepless night of crying.

I had no idea what my colleague from another all Christian women’s community was talking about when I phoned her and she expressed surprise at the tone of Krista’s ‘article’. I had the magazine of course, delivered by subscription the week before, or maybe a month before (it was a quarterly). I had not gotten to reading it yet. It is much more work running this place than you would guess.

Doug, you called later to say you had seen it too, do you recall. By then I had read it but was too stunned to react. You tried to play damage control, I think, speculating on Krista's intentions.

"I am sure she thought you would approve," you had said.

"I knew you would not approve," Krista said, lips trembling, "but I mean every word of that article. It is true. I am sorry. For once you will have to accept divergent thought because it is out of this place now. I have not acted on it for years. It just came out one day. I have no idea how I had the courage to send it..."

"That, that is your explanation to me. You call courage! But not a word to me. I had to hear about it, from outside. What are we then?" I asked.

"That is the question! What are we?"

Everyone had left us alone. Nobody wanted to choose sides publicly although all had in their hearts- against me. I knew even then and now I know why I had to die.

Traitors!!!

"You know, we have meetings all the time to discuss these issues. There is protocol for grievances..."

"That is just it, Janet, there are so many procedures that there is just no way to simply talk to you! Not that it would do much good. Your ways are your ways and mostly we like that, them, you, but sometimes..." She stopped for some time.

Finally I said, "go on."

"I cannot say," Krista admitted.

“Are you that terrified of me?” I sobbed, grabbing her arm.

“No, no that’s not it. I really do not know what to say. All I had to say I put in the article. Now I can tell you how much I really am happy here and how much I really, really love you.”

We hugged a long time, both crying, and agreed afterwards, after she assured me I need make no changes whatsoever- none!- we agreed to never speak of it again.

CHAPTER 25

The leader woman comes with meat. I smell her before I see her. I was half-dozing. One gets tired of doing nothing. But it is important to be alert.

I have warned this one once before but she will not heed. The blood is on her skin and it looks delicious. Worse I had a taste of her last time. She is in my scent memory still. Her dominance calls to me. I must subjugate her as they have subjugated me.

The bright haired one has left me free. When I was little I could run free in the forest, down to the water, after rabbits and squirrels and chipmunks, not the cats though. They are part of our pack and as such taboo.

At some point they began to fear me. It was then I knew I had grown larger, stronger. I felt it, the urge to run. Mostly I noticed that the spaces became smaller. Things were shorter. The thing is because they feared me I knew my power and because they knew my power I knew I needed to use it. Naturally it was the dominant one I attacked.

It was not a serious attack. I could easily have killed her. But I was waiting. Where were the males? Who made the children? I was becoming able. The pack needed young and I needed to mate.

The rears of these tall two legged walkers do not call to me. Even still I could smell when her fertile time had passed. I noted it with no feeling. I simply waited and wondered who I should challenge. There were no males. The females were clearly dominant.

But when I transgressed and there was no reaction from the pack, I knew all was permitted. A male could lead. Mostly I wanted freedom again. The thing they put on to choke me close bites at my neck. My walking world is small. Luckily I can still smell far and wide all dream.

Still she mocks me with this blood upon her. She says I will share the meat but not the act of the kill. But that is the most sacred part! Worse I think she does not eat the meat herself. Her blood tasted odd. She gives me scraps she thinks unfit for her.

I looked inside my dreams to make sure. Was I to attack her then? Was it permitted by the forces as well as by the pack? I did not concern myself with whether I would succeed, only with whether I should. I knew I would succeed but I would have done it if it should be done even if I must fail and even die. It is important to do what the forces indicate we would. In my dreams I saw clearly that I would attack. So now I do.

I have her leg! It takes an instant. It is that easy. She cannot pry me off though she claws with soft claws and tries to reach to bite me. I am waiting but I am not sure what for. This will not kill her. It seems it is necessary to kill her now. The leg will bleed her dry even if I lick it. Better to kill her quickly if I can.

But I find I must study the situation. She stays down with me, not poised for anything, unable to move I think. She is

giving herself to me. I take a moment to honor that brave decision. Then I pounce but her arm protects her head and neck, so I rip it off with my teeth.

I have always loved the sideways jerk feeling of my neck ripping flesh aside. It is the best way. Now I can get in to finish while she looks into the no space of dreams waiting for the end. Her taste is full of something more than power.

I can feel her in my heart and it feels I have done the needed thing but it is not finished yet.

CHAPTER 26

FEMALE LEADERSHIP PATTERNS:
AN OLD PARADIGM by Krista Albright,
founding member of the all female intentional community
Females Armed with Reason and Morality (F.A.R.M.)

Sisters and Brothers in intentional community, it is with a sad heart and the utmost humility that I feel it is my duty to inform you that after more than ten years experimenting with an all woman leadership rotation I feel I can draw some none too hasty conclusions and those conclusions are far from encouraging of our hopes for more peaceful interaction in a world where women wield more power.

In short, it has been my experience and observation that as women we have reproduced almost all forms of conflict, iniquity, and stalemate that research and history shows males to have produced and with many the same results.

The sociogram (Figure 1-1) which I compiled from weeks of data observing both social and business interactions of the seven members of the community shows clearly that one figure has been granted dominance whether she asserted such a claim or was promoted by others. That person, henceforth Subject A, is also the sole landowner in the

community, therefore we see immediately reproduction of male patterns of dominance based on territory.

Subject A leads by communication, that is clear but by the very roughly equal distribution of her time among all members it can be seen that she requires no alliances. Nonetheless alliances have formed with regards to other interactions. In particular Subject B, an older international (exterior relations to existing power structures in the larger society have been left out of discussion for the purposes of this particular paper although they clearly have bearing) and Subject C by far the youngest have a tight bond Subject B acting as a sort of mentor. That is encouraging except that she seems to have reproduced in her young protogee the exclusionary attitudes and practices exercised towards the outlier, Subject D.

Subject D, as can be seen in the sociogram, has been roundly ostracized by all members of the community including the newcomer, Subject E. Readers can believe that this is not by self-selection when I admit to them that I am that Subject D and very much desirous of more dealings with my fellows. Only the leader Subject A will treat with me significantly, and occasionally Subject F but only in her self-appointed function as peacemaker of the group, a function to which Subject A sought to elevate her but in which she has yet to be taken seriously by other members.

All of the above has been leading to some break downs in the group dynamics as readers may well imagine, with the result that one member, Subject G has more and more absented herself from the group and is clearly establishing strong links to an exterior party. Can anyone be surprised to learn that that party is male?

The newcomer to the group Subject E meanwhile, sizing up the group dynamics and disruptions accurately, seems poised for a takeover play based not on coercion or persuasion but mere alternance.

The dysfunction of our group is all the more disheartening when one considers the disconnect it exhibits with the overt stated rhetoric. The group is meant to be non-hierarchical. Pairings are not permitted. Outside liaisons are not permitted. No member may be ostracized. If we had a clear leader she could dictate that two members be separated, one member be eliminated, another reintegrated, but in point of fact the leader, Subject A, shows a marked preference for one member, Subject F, not in quantity of interactions as stated above but in the tone and value of those interactions for which naturalistic conclusion the readers will have to decide whether or not to trust the author.

It was to be hoped that if women could order their lives that they would do so in a manner different from men and in fact tending to better, more peaceful and harmonious results, when in fact we can now clearly see to women replicating the mistakes men have made throughout history. I hope readers need no history lessons from me on the sad results of territoriality, alienations, favoritism, and hypocrisy.

I offer these results in a pessimistic mood but in the hopes that these very observations might prove a catalyst for the positive changes that the author believes are necessary for the proper, reasonable and moral, functioning of the F.A.R.M. community.

CHAPTER 27

In life I have only had two or three dreams where I knew that I was dreaming and this is one of them.

I am about to give birth to Doug as a full grown man. I am dressed in an Indian tunic and on my feet bent over with my hands on Robert's shoulders. No wait, they are my fathers.

They keep passing objects over my back- eggs and chicken, a mortar and pestle, an axe. My feet are on the water. It is a brackish river flowing but not fast. I can see large dark fish in it idling by sometimes.

The pain is intense. I tell myself it is just a dream but the pain is just as intense as the real thing

He is already born!

“You have to do it again. You want to do it. It is important. You can do it with patience, mother,” speaks the dula.

Now the contractions come stronger and I stop breathing so much but I see the water rising up to meet each contraction.

We are all lifted. I love the water and this standing is much better than the old feet in stirrups although my legs are tired.

The dula gives me a calabash with a thick yellow green liquid in it and I drink it and my lips become numb.

Almost right away after that the birth comes. It slides out in one motion which was a feeling I always wished I had been able to remember whether that last moment felt like one gush or longer. I thought I might have another baby for a long time to find out but then it seemed a stupid reason and things had turned out so badly for poor Douglas, that...

Dougie! I look down into the water to see my boy. I wipe away tears but still all I can see is the water and the cord going down into it. I know they can still breathe while attached but I want him brought out.

I remember Moon's joke about her hippie dilemma: as a Wican she said she was required to eat her afterbirth but as a Vegan she felt she could not! She solved it by loving women not men!

The water is beginning to clear and I begin to make out a human form in the water. No, it is only my reflection.

CHAPTER 28

INTERVIEW MAGAZINE

FEMALE GROUP FOUNDER

I might as well admit right now I am her biggest fan and a patient. Dr. Janet Roben has agreed to an unprecedented interview for the press based on this relationship. Normally she is not interested in disseminating information about her thriving all woman community because she describes it as an ongoing experiment private to the participants.

“I have not even published my findings as a participant-observer for the use of other practitioners yet,” she protested. But I talked her into it!

We are sitting in the beautiful big, sunlit communal kitchen of the community known as F.A.R.M., Females Armed with Reason and Morality. I want to begin at the beginning.

Mildred: Why did you become a therapist?

Dr. J.R.: I think it was a desire to help others, as disingenuous as that may sound to the cynical society of today. It is also undeniable that I had a certain facility with the subject matter, or rather matters- psychology, sociology, anthropology, communications, etc.

Mildred: And why did you form a community?

Dr J.R.: Well, it just seemed the next logical step. I had a group of patients in solitary situations who wanted a community to ease their loneliness. While I was already working with them there was some risk that I would go nuts myself trying to attend to everyone twenty four seven so I set up a system, without hierarchy, of power rotation, chores to provide for our living environment and sustenance (I had some property) and then later we added in the therapeutic piece of nurturing rescued animals.

Mildred: What is your relationship to the outside community?

Dr. J.R.: We honestly do not have a lot. Of course we need to get supplies from time to time for which purpose I keep a car. We have an occasional outing but mainly keep busy and entertained on site. We have visitors also. We manage to do most of our own repairs and comply with the many, many Virginia laws under which we seem to fall. Let me see, oh, and there is the housing co-op federation in D.C. for whom we and a number of farms like ours- organic, leftist- provide produce. They come for pick ups and we occasionally go visit them for a big potluck. That is about it. Of course we have families of origin some of which are more supportive than others.

Mildred: What have been the biggest challenges?

Dr. J.R.: Staying solvent! Ha ha. No, seriously, there have been challenges of course especially in the early going. There were many people at that time who were attracted to

our lifestyle, experiment in living it was still called then, but who had widely ranging agenda and sometimes incongruent ones. We had to decide if we wanted to grow at the expense of purpose. We decided to stay small, dangerously small many community leaders warned us. They experienced high attrition and turn over. But I think our model has worked because while we have only added one member over the decade and more that we have been operating, and that was in a situation of extreme distress, still we managed to keep all our original members.

Mildred: What have been your biggest successes?

Dr. J.R.: I think I would have to say it has been just that-keeping all our members. The communications have not always gone exactly as I for one would have wanted but I think I could not have asked for more concerted and sustained effort.

Mildred: What would you say to yourself if you could start it all differently? What would you change or keep the same? I mean, what advice would you give other women interested in starting similar communities?

Dr. J.R.: Don't! No, see I am joking again but that would be my biggest advice. Keep a sense of humor. Try to laugh, be flexible, have fun with the work, ride out the hard times, and just keep trying without expectations. Do not take anything too seriously. I think we at the Farm have taken ourselves far too seriously at times, no? What do you think, Mildred?

Mildred: Yes, I would have to respectfully agree with you on that one, Doctor. And finally one last question, if you would be so indulgent- Where do you see the community going in the near and distant future?

Dr. J.R.: Hm, good question. Let me see. I would have to say in the near future I anticipate some situations as several of the members, myself included, are entering menopause

which can be a difficult time for all women. We at the Farm have cycled together up and down many a hill so I am sure we can conquer this as well. But as we age medical expenses become a bigger and bigger concern of course. We will need young blood to manage the garden and animals unless we seek hired help which we have tried not to do for various reasons- most are men! We have only one younger member at present. One member has a retirement account coming due we can count on claiming and then almost all of us will draw social security (maybe one never worked much) but we do not want to depend on that. We really want to keep the Farm running if possible. Then, in the long run, as they say, we are all dead.

CHAPTER 29

Looking back on it now it seems I did favor Mildred. I missed her so much when she left. She was such a sweet soul. We should have stayed in better touch. She is the only pure one now. All the others are sullied for me, bloodied by my death and their own guilty consciences. Mildred and Doug remain pure.

Damn Krista! So what if the others ostracized her. She was a damn difficult pain in the ass. Not that we all were not the same but she was on another level and should have learned from the reactions of others which- the article shows- she was keen enough to perceive but, no! She never changed. Not to her dying say. I tried to overcompensate. I tried to make her feel needed too.

Hell I did need her. I needed someone. Menopause was hell! I am glad it is over even if death was my exit pass. The physical side was one thing but the moods. Is that what adolescence felt like? God bless you, Dougie! I may have hit my own meds once or twice in my extreme despair myself. I needed to keep functioning- that is my way- but Krista was free to quit functioning. I offered her vacation at

the Farm of away. I wanted to send her to whatever family would have her if any, truth be told. Angie was too polite to fight but Angie had a temper and I could tell she was losing patience with Krista. We had already lost Mildred to her.

It is obvious now why she and Mildred fought. It is now also obvious to me that I did not do any better job with my second set of children- the ladies of the Farm- than I did with my first experiment in that field- with Dougie. Not that Robert did better. Who can?

Maybe we do the best we can. I had hoped in the afterlife to know something better. I am left with only questions. If this is it, better total blackness- no sight, no thought.

CHAPTER 30

Shiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!!!!

I think I just thought myself out of existence. Something went away for an instance there. I did not realize anything more until I felt my panic. It was not like losing air. I was hit in the gut once, wind knocked out, by a soccer ball. This is more like hearing the click behind your lovers goodbye door, back when you still cared about lovers. It is like the first time you drop your baby and think it will crack, not bounce. It is like when you first heard your mom was dead, the sweetest being you ever knew, the holder of all that was supposed to be true and beautiful in the world.

For some- many perhaps- that moment of the death of a parent happens long before they die. For me it was the first time I overheard my mother speaking to an aunt on the phone about me. I did not know until then that I was anything but wonderful not matter that I heard the servants whisper what a witch I was and such things as that. When my mother said it about me, I knew that it could be true. I would never be perfect again.

Now I am dead! I am out of my head! Am I in a hospital bed? Am I the wine and the bread?

Can I NOT be? Is it possible? Will I then be perfect again?

What if I am an ant on my own shoe? What if I am not the butterfly in the rainforest or the tropical storm it causes? What if I am only the beating of the wings?

How many of me will now fit on the head of a pin?

Can I fit through the eye of the needle, the hurricane?

I have not amassed. Or have I? Not old perhaps or jewels or even libraries of books. But I have so many thoughts and feelings left. Am I unspooling them like unexposed film to the bright obliterating sunlight now?

Would that I could erase all these memories, if it would release me. Yet a moment ago I dreaded being gone. Something still left unfinished.

Stop! It hurts too much. Douglas cannot hear me and I do not know what to tell him anyway. All I see of the people I love dearest makes me hate them. Do not let me go to my grave hating those I have spent my life loving.

God, I cannot even forget the stupid details, like the abysmal state in which I left the finances. I did not think I cared about leaving a legacy per se but the women need a place to grow old. I owe them that even if they killed me without thought. Who cares about my own history? Sartre said hell is other people. But I am alone!!

Let me instead think of Reverence for Life the philosophy of his uncle Albert Schweitzer. Old Al had two great triumphs. One was at thirty years old a famous theologian and lecturer and musician and and and he quit it all to study medicine to go to Gabon in central Africa to start a hospital. In this he succeeded as well. Then came war and by the accident of

history that made him German (Alsace where he was born is today French) and Gabon being held by the French then he was put in prison and the hospital collapsed.

I think I would have died then but he lived and rebuilt the hospital (without his sick wife who had to stay with the daughter in Europe thereafter) and won the Nobel Peace Prize.

All that I left will soon be in ruins. Would I go back for it? But what if I am mangled, chewed up. I do not care about the looks. I am old. But what if I cannot move, or see, or speak. TO go back just to change a will from some name Doug to some name Angela- who are these creatures anyway and do they have separate identities?

I would not go back. I must go on.

CHAPTER 31

I am looking down on a vicious scene. I am disconnected from it although my sight is crystal clear, and I know that it is my body the wolf is eating.

Oddly I notice many peripheral things simultaneously. There is mud the color of milk chocolate. Woolfie has matted fur under its neck but I cannot tell if it is blood or the mud. The blood is very vivid colors- more than one. There are streaks where I moved that are lighter. The pool under the arm Woolfie chewed off is dark, dark almost solid. The grawing where he had my leg at first is pink and filleted almost like salmon sushi.

Not unduly curious I try to figure out what killed me. Wolfie is on my abdomen, chest and side, so I may have smothered or severed my spinal cord. There is a neck wound also. Woolfie's teeth are very yellow. We stopped taking care of his oral hygiene some time ago for safety reasons.

The blue of Woolfie's kennel is very faded. I had meant to repaint it. It looks similar to the faded blue of my torn jeans. Interestingly I think to look at my sex but it is under me and

still in jean cloth. I am twisted at an odd angle. My head also takes another direction. The hair looks delicately laid oddly enough.

Woolfie jerks his head back and forth briskly getting bits of meat out of bone. I remember as a pup I would wrestle him for his bones- plastic ones. We tried not to give him meat from his early years on so he would never get a taste for it. We should have stayed with the soy!

There are leaves plastered down in the dirt and a branch and on the branch is a stickbug. When I was girl I would love to find stickbugs on the farm and praying mantis and ladybugs. We would roll the roly polly bugs around like marbles.

Krista must have called the police. By the time they come she is also gone. The others are watching horrified from the screened in porch door, terrified to come out until animal control comes, except Julie or course who was no there yet.

The animal control guy comes in the cop car. He has on a yellow jacket with official initials over his flannel shirt. He is very fat. He raises his rifle right away and without hesitation shoots Woolfie well. Woolfie goes straight down dead with one shot behind the shoulder. The animal control guy must be a hunter.

One of the women screams. Or is it me?

Woolfie makes no sound. I suddenly feel distress. I remember Aldo and look down into his eye. There is no green fire. I cannot determine my distance up above.

Do I want to see the women rush out? The police is already untangling my body from Woolfies. But it is clearly too late. He calls the coroner. The women approach.

I want to go away. I want to die, die, die. I hate them. I love Woolfie!

It is weird to see your own eye. Mercifully Carol closes my body's eyes and just like that I can see no more.

CHAPTER 32

This time it is my funeral for sure. Robert has come. I find that I am glad. I no longer wish to pretend I am not. Who am I to hold grudges beyond the grave? For I am sure now that I am dead! Doug is on the other end of the crowd. He is with Carol. Carol was always his favorite.

Maybe if I could just let go I can move on. Why do I need to see this? What more do I need to see? I want to forgive them. I do. But...

Mildred is here too!

She always said she would come back if Krista left. I guess Krista left alright. I hope they can make peace with one another now somewhere somehow separately if not together ever again.

I am remembering an old habit of mine I adopted on one of my stints living abroad. I thought it up as a way to get over thinking of the people- whose language I admit ruefully I did not speak- as a mass. I would spend time in any crowd no matter how large looking at each person one by one- as

incognito as possible- and wishing them well and love and light. It made me feel better if no one else.

The place they chose for the funeral is perfect- by the big willow, under the eaves as it were. We can all fit, a small bunch.

Angela is putting on weight. She looks blue against the black dress, sewn herself no doubt. She is a master seamstress, and artist.

Moon is beautiful flushed. I could kiss her if I had lips. (I am glad my coffin is closed and I cannot see through it. I asked to be burned though. Will I end in the fire pit?) Carol has hold of Moon's hand so tight her knuckles are white. It is Carol of all people who bursts out first and Moon holds her.

George is with Julie and I am glad. He is good for her. They combat each other, making both sharp but in the end they will not leave one another and that is something after all in the transitory world highly sought after. What is more is he understands her in the end better than we do at the Farm. That is what she seeks, rightfully so.

Doug has crossed over to Robert now. Robert has to sit he is shaking so and Doug rubs his shoulders. What a good boy. Poor Robert- he did love me well and long and still. It is good too he can let Doug be as strong as he needs for now.

Krista, are you here? You are somewhere here, aren't you, sweet child. I feel I will be with you shortly, sweetie, as I should be. You of all of us should not be left alone. They all loved you in their own ways as inadequate as mine perhaps but you can forgive, you have wisdom, always did, and now too soon shall I. That is why you went ahead of me, to prepare the way. It is what you wanted to do but I would not accept. I was not ready. You were right. Now I see. I am getting ready.

I want to forgive everyone, send love and light and peace to each before I go. Okay, yes, I want to hear them too. But look how they weep for both of us. But we are not separate. They are the separate beings, being bound by bodies still. We will wait for them like Pureland Buddhas!!

“I would like to begin once I can find my voice,” Angie choked. “After all have spoken, we will take Janet to the fire to let her go. Unfortunately that fire is a truck behind the storage shed. Law will not let us burn a body on our own land. After we will have food and party with jazz, Dixieland style goin up solemn and out joyous. Who wants to begin speaking?”

“I do,” said Doug, “as you know mom left the land to me although we were estranged, but I told dad we cannot keep it. It is yours and so I have signed it over to Angela here who was kind enough to make the funeral arrangements while I was in my funk. I know that is what mom would have wanted. She gave everything to you all and I wish she knew now how much that meant to me. She imagined, I think, that I resented- why else leave me of all people the land? And sure there were times I was jealous but she built something special here and now I lost one mom but I have you all still, many moms. I think that was her plan!”

I wish I could say it was! Another of life’s nice surprises.

Angela spoke, “Nobody can ever do for us what Janet has done and nobody will try. What we are asked to do is move on with our collective and individual lives in a world without Janet. It is almost inconceivable to say it- on a Farm without Janet. We will never stop missing her. What she wants though is for us to live full lives, as she did.”

“Fuck all this destiny shit, you damn existentials,” yelled Julie, “What the fuck are we saying. Janet this and Janet that. Janet was a bitch who ruled our lives and we killed her! Why doesn’t one of you say that?! Doug, you hated her I know. Robert too! Angie, she kept you down, black

and down and you know it! She killed Krista with her quack theories and irresponsible negligence. How fitting it is that she should be killed by the beasts, the very symbols of her lies of love and nurturing. Because she could not nurture! She could not nurture us! She could not nurture her own son. She could not nurture herself! It was her tragic flaw. I loved her more than anyone on the planet, even more than George, more than my own parents. She has abandoned us. She could not survive menopause. It was suicide! She... she... she..."

It is true! All of it! Thank you, Julie!!

George ran after her.

"I do not know what to say after that," Carol apologized.

"Of course I knew her the shortest time," Moon apologized.

"Let us go in and eat," said Mildred, "That is best."

Eat! Drink! Be merry! Tomorrow you die. Today I do. I forgive them all and most of all myself. I think I can go now. Goodbye.

PART
TWO

CHAPTER 32

They tell me most infants do not remember their own birth but I do. I looked up and right away I knew the woman looking at me.

“Moon,” I said. They were all astonished.

It was when they put me in her arms that I knew that I was tiny and I was starting over.

Unfortunately all the words would not come back for some time. But many memories I possessed. They called me Janet, after the woman who founded the Farm where I live and who died by being eaten by a wolf, Wolfie.

I am that Janet and I remember the wolf attack. I remember the funeral before I remember how to use any of the words I heard.

I cannot remember how to read. Somehow I know to ask for Borges as my bedtime story. There is one where an author is condemned to die but granted time as he faces the firing squad to finish his novel in his mind. A tear freezes half way down his cheek. When he has composed the last

perfect line in his head and the novel is complete, he feels the tear slide down and then the bullets hit. That is the story I wanted to hear.

I cry at them to let them know that I was like that for a long time, suspended. I think I can. I think I can.

It is Carol who does most of the reading to me and other instruction. There are many skills to master, hand-eye coordination with blocks, plastic keys, stuffed animals. Moon does the dirty stuff though. She feeds me and bathes me and changes me. I wonder how she made me. A sperm bank no doubt, in vitro. It is Carol who decides I am a prodigy. Moon just thinks I am adorable. Should I point to 'old' Janet's things like the new dalai lama child, freak them out?

Better to let things take their natural course. Mildred has stayed on the Farm and sometimes looks at my eyes with a glimmer of recognition. Angela is too busy running things to notice me much except as a nuisance. But I am not a bad baby. I rarely cry. Julie is still sullen and withdrawn. I wish I could counsel her but I am an infant at present.

Soon she leaves to live with George. There are only four women left on the Farm, four and half if you count me.

The animals are still there but are going to pot. Nobody really wants them anymore. They are almost wild. I like to be taken to go see them but I cannot communicate it yet except with giggles and gurgles when I see them. Moon is overprotective though and Carol as always is cerebral and would prefer to sit inside with books.

It is strange to be a baby with self-awareness. Not only that I can remember my infancy as Janet last time. My mother was surprisingly doting at that stage, clumsy but unmistakably moved by me. Perhaps it was just too much for her to sustain. It is overwhelming for all parties. Father was an absentee at that stage. He did not get interested in me until later.

I wonder what Dougie must have felt towards me as a baby. Was I cuddly, cerebral, comforting, commanding? I recall reading all the books. I got conflicting folk advice from everyone who I did not ask. I was terrified. The tiny baby unable to lift its own head was the most completely parasitic creature I could imagine and I was scared to death to injure it. As long as it survived intact I would accept whatever neuroses came along with our stumblings. From that respect I suppose I was a success as a mother by my own low standards. Douglas was a fussy child and a sickly baby. I was constantly in terrors. There were fevers, diarrhea, vomiting, wheezing. At times I just wanted it to end. One time giving him an ice bath to calm a fever I honestly did not know which way it would go or how I wanted it to go. I was feverish myself. I could not take anymore. Robert was around, I will give him that, but useless otherwise, except as a nuisance barely able to run errands, and demanding in his own right. Ugh!

Life is a strange thing and I am not sure how I feel to have it. After all though, I remember some things that make it worth while. Children see things more directly as a consequence of not having categories for them. I am in between on this- seeing things directly and in my head somehow seeing the categories just as directly- without words for them yet- like real physical boxes I can sort the world into, or not. I look at a butterfly today and know I am glad to be alive again. It is enough.

Maybe it would be better to live without language. Perhaps I could keep this butterfly whole without taking it apart to name all the dead, dry pieces, or mounting it in a flat book with a Latin name under it nobody knows or can pronounce.

Can a child choose to stay dumb. If I fall in the forest and do not make a sound, do I not bleed. Blood by any other name is just as red! The ferns glen is in the forest and I want to go there to lie down on the moss but I cannot ask for

it. And I think of the Borges story and Aldo and all the songs and decide after all language would be okay.

Language at last comes to me in a dream. I think I can. I think I can.

CHAPTER 2

“blame to is one No .alive more any dead the make doesn’t which
,chin the under it chucking and language old good the stroking are
strollers the meanwhile while, dead the at gaze must I” :Jelinek
Elfriede laureate Nobel the read you when time last this all learned
You.

.dream a just is this Anyway

.curtain the behind man old little no is There

“Flakes Fresh with cat your Love”

?litter kitty sell to used is word the if What ?typewriter the with
bridge the over it throw ,it revile they if What ?it means mom like
love mean student lusty young a Does ?research scientific a, report
government a in Say ?sing the it is ,written is it If ?mean it does
what, love speaks another If .same the never is It .it buffets Rain
.it twist Winds ?here they do What .hears Another .matter No
?tomorrow thing same the mean you Do ?mean you do what But
.it mean You .it say You .love Take .you escapes it ,word a create
you Once

.anyway it read would one know, was there If .language for manual user's no is There .way that in virginity like is It .back going no is There .back going no is there language of curtain the behind man little the seen have you Once

.might you as try, streams the structure can you then more any you by structured not is Language .oceans the by structured am I than more any language by structured not are You

:instructions these you gives doG

God gives you these instructions:

You are not structured by language any more than I am structured by the oceans. Language is not structured by you any more than you can structure the streams, try as you might.

Once you have seen the man behind the curtain of language there is no going back. There is no going back. It is like virginity in that way.

There is no user's manual for language. If there was, no one would read it anyway.

Once you create a word, it escapes you. Take love. You say it. You mean it. But what do you mean? Do you mean the same thing tomorrow? No matter. Another hears. What do they hear? Winds twist it. Rain buffets it. It is never the same. If another speaks love, what does it mean? If it is written, is it the same? Say in a government report, a scientific research? Does a young lusty student mean love like mom means it? What if they revile it, throw it over the bridge with the typewriter? What if the word is used to sell kitty litter?

“Love your cat with fresh flakes.”

There is no little old man behind the curtain.

Anyway this is just a dream.

You learned all this last time when you read the Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek: “I must gaze at the dead while meanwhile the strollers are stroking the good old language and chucking it under the chin, which doesn’t make the dead any more alive. No one is to blame.”

CHAPTER 3

It is from a post it note war that I am learning to read.

The first one I notice is in the bathroom. I love the bathrooms. I am able to walk now and since I explained to the women that I am very aware of the safety protocols of the Farm, having written most of them myself, they allow me to wander at will as long as I agree to join them at regularly scheduled meal times.

They have not yet accepted that I am still Janet. In fact I have not yet accepted that I am still Janet for the simple reason that I have a new body. I have some Moon and some unknown man in me now and I can feel them sometimes. It is eerie, as eerie for me as they may find accepting the Janet part. On the other hand I do not have all Janet's memories. I cannot always tell what the holes are- there is one big one I am sure, a source of secret shame and delight, but most I can guess- like language- from observing others and simple inference.

I love bathrooms because I love water. I play in the bath for hours. There are toys for me everywhere. They are spoiling me terribly, setting no limits, but I have decided not to tell them this yet. Let them learn for themselves. I did not do

enough of that last time- letting people learn for themselves. It blocked my own learning too, this tendency.

There are tons of gels and creams and sponges and whatnot in the bathrooms too which I like to get in. I feel a little bad to admit that I may have instigated part of this war, at least this first note I read, although I do not think it was the first post it written in protest between these too.

This one was from Julie to Carol. This was just before Julie left. It said:

“Stop using my towel, for fuck’s sake already! How many times do I have to ask you?”

It was placed on the mirror.

I guess you guessed I was the one who liked to use Julie’s towel. It was the fluffiest! I would have told her too but then I realized that this had nothing to do with towels. This was war!

“Does your towel cost you money, princess? Because the expensive aloe vera shampoo I bought and you used up and never paid me back for did cost a lot, cabrona!”

Carol wrote this I am ashamed to say. I know what you are thinking but I did not use the aloe vera shampoo.

In the kitchen there is a note next week.

“I helped myself to the last of your leftover pie, thanks. I would have shared my ice cream with you if you had asked. You did not ask, though, did you, piggie-wiggie?”

Do not ask me which one of them wrote that one. I stopped keeping track.

Moon had a blackboard up on her door which she used as a message board to hear about me from any of the women.

Julie wrote on it: “Moon, Please talk to you crazy wife and ask her to stop tormenting me! I cannot take much more! Thanks a lot!”

Moon wrote back” “My name is not moon. It is Switzerland.”

A very colorful note was put on Julie’s door tonight. “Keep it down!” it read in neon highlighter colors, at least five of them. I can hear no noise.

Carol suddenly runs out of her room with a wad of paper and throws it at Julie’s door. I pick it up and read it. Julie must have slipped it into Carol’s room. She sleeps separately from Moon and me even though they are out in the open now. Angie dropped the celibacy rule. But Moon and Carol are not very demonstrative lovers anyway.

It is George’s presence that threatens. He too is staying out of the Julie war with Carol. But where is Angela? She needs to mediate this before it gets out of hand. Surely she does not expect me to do it.

“You go to hell!!!” Julie’s note reads.

The next day Julie moves out of the Farm and in with George. Angie now tries to arrange a sit down. Julie no shows so the next time Carol goes out and hides in the forest. Finally both sides as brought it, teary apologies exchanged, but Julie demands George be admitted and Angela balks, as does Moon to my surprise. It is Mildred who remains neutral. She has seen these disputes before and perhaps waits until she if needed, if needs be.

Julie says she misses me, Janet. I am right here!

“She would never have let it come to this! I don’t blame you, Carol. You were just the catalyst. I wish I had kids like you Moon. I wish you too well.” She is silent on Angela and Mildred. She sees them as outsiders. She says

she will visit but rarely does, despite a total open door policy we always had for ex-members. She leaves.

And then there were four.

CHAPTER 4

Doug has come to visit and wants to play with me. This is a moment I have been dreading.

I almost call him son right away without even thinking.

What should I say?

He picks me up in his arms. Oh, this is awkward.

“Hiya, cutie!” says Douglas.

Hiya, yourself!

He puts me down. He has noticed something in my eyes.

“That’s quite a child you have their, Mooncake!” Doug teases her.

“Yes, there is something special about her,” Carol answers.

“She is Janet’s reincarnation,” says Mildred, matter-of-factly.

Everyone stares at her stupefied. They do not dare think about it so somebody changes the subject. It is never mentioned again.

Doug does not try to play with me again. This is a reversal! I t was I who did not know how to play with him last time. I will not make that mistake again.

I pick up my favorite stuffed animal, a Raggedy Anne doll and I toss it into his lap. He tosses it absently back at me, softly. I toss it to him again. He tosses it back. Soon we have a great game of catch. After only a little while I am so tired I have to go nap and he tucks me in with a kiss. Ah.

I remember Doug loved the circus. On a rare outing to the mall Moon secretly ecstatic despite her hippie tradition, the European Carol horrified, I beg them to buy me animal toys.

Then at home I gather all the scraps of strong, cardboard, bits of fabric. I stitch up a tent. I make three rings. I stretch a high rope and dangle trapezes. I get Mildred's make up. (She is the Farm's secret diva.) I make myself up like a clown when Doug next comes to visit.

(I later will get in trouble for stealing the make up but it was worth it.)

Last time I learned how to juggle for little Dougie but I cannot do it this time. My little limbs are not ready. Nonetheless we have a great time playing with the little animals and making my G.I. Janes (no Barbies for me but war is okay, why?) do acrobatics.

Doug came to visit more and more often to the Farm.

When I got bigger her took me to the see-saw by the willow and to eat blackberries. I let him carry me but it always made me uncomfortable. I was glad when I was big enough to keep up on my own two feet. I did like to hold hands

with him as we strolled. He set me scavenger hunts and I had to find nuts, mushrooms, certain color leaves...

I loved it and dearly wished I had done more of this with him when he was small. Perhaps I did after all. My memories are hazy. Maybe there is never enough of that time, before adolescence comes and all that jazz.

I decided not to rush my childhood this time. I did not speak to the adults much. I tried to play outside as much as I could. I did not read as precociously as I had last time.

I liked being a kid.

CHAPTER 5

My second first day of school. There may have been other first days before that I have forgotten.

I am wearing my Strawberry Shortcake sneakers. They smell like chemical strawberries! My backpack is full of lunch, spare clothes, a pencil case full of school supplies. It is very heavy! The backpack is a Space Ranger backpack. Moon and Carol especially do not want me to become gender typed. I am not in a dress like the other girls at school. I am in blue jeans, bit with a top and sweater set no boy would be caught dead in I am sure!

The walk to the bus was long and although Moon held my hand (Carol stayed in bed) I tripped and my jeans are already dirty. I am a very old woman and here I am crying and terrified to go to school. I remember the teasing, the shaming, the mean teachers, the bullies, then the work conditions themselves- long hours, hard boring work, standing in lines endlessly, part of an oppressed mass. None of my knowledge can help me. Moon is bawling too which does not help.

The Kindergarten teacher is quite nice. She is Hindu with a dot on her forehead, and fat. Her musical lilted English accent lulls me to sleep.

I am playing with the blocks and create a big castle structure I call the Annales. The student teacher who has been watching me because I play by myself hears this term and becomes alarmed. She asks me about the blocks.

All my educational memories have come back to me, including my undergrad thesis in French history. I tell her about each block- the one named Bloch, another founder named Febvre. This one is Braudel. That one is Le Roi Ladurie. This structure is built for the long duration.

It turns out my student teacher also did French history undergrad. She calls Moon asking her excitedly about her background and mine and the father's (unknown) and then about Carol and something about Mentality.

Moon is concerned about the teacher finding out about the Farm and her lifestyle and trying to take me away and is relieved when the student teacher asks if I can be tested. Turns out I might be a genius!

The funny thing is when the test results come back they find out that my IQ is sub-par. My new body it turns out does not agree with my old experiences. This will be weird! They say I must be an idiot savant and want to put me in special classes. Carol takes me out of the school, to home school me. She says she can do as good a job as any special education teacher. She orders all the texts and subscribes to many home schooling websites, some of which scare her.

“They have groups to keep kids home to teach them nothing but Christian dogma, denying evolution, teaching that gays are evil, that America is run by Jews and Commies. It is scary! Come to think of it, they are evidence that their might not have been much evolution after all!”

Luckily there are good groups as well. I remember last time around I went to Montessori school until the middle of elementary when my parents decided I had better go to public school to get better ‘socialized’ after all. (Finances, they assured themselves, had nothing to do with it.) Well, public school was a disaster. Having learned mathematics on an abacus I could easily do figures in my head but could not write out the steps and ‘carry’ numbers.

Homework meant nothing to me. I brought in epic illustrated stories I made up in my room. The teacher wanted chapter seven numbers four through nine. Bells rang and I had no idea what to do- salivate? I did not know how or when to go to the bathroom (hall pass?) so I peed myself. I could only write in cursive, not print.

At Montessori Teacher Joe just asked what I wanted to do and I said go sit on the tire outside and write and off I went, coming in for story time or lunch. Eventually I would adjust to public school and get put in the highest classes, but it was still hell. Only because of Montessori I never lost my love of learning. I mentioned Montessori to Moon but she had learned to tune out my adult speech, which she could not always understand.

I realized I was a zeitgeist, literally a time ghost. I was what Sartre called the universal singular, roughly approximated by Marx's famous quote: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past." He meant women too!

CHAPTER 6

It occurs to me now that perhaps many of the ideas of the Farm were not wrong in essence but in tone. What I mean by that is that I chose the wrong name. From early on I was having an argument with men who were not there.

Why ‘Armed’? Are Reason and Morality my highest values? I remember thinking I wanted to try to reclaim attributes labeled masculine. I did not agree that we should content ourselves with nurturing and multi-tasking, nor did I want those ‘feminine’ traits to be beyond my son. Was I not a reasonable person, moral? Now I know there are better things to be.

Immediately I finger paint my womanifesto on the wall:

WELCOME TO SAYWAC

“What does it mean?” Carol asked me.

Synapse of Anarcho-Yoddlers Who Adore Chocolate.

Angie has picked the wrong moment to start disciplining me. The others love it and in no way want it scrubbed. In

fact they want to change our name from FARM to SAYWAC officially.

I feel bad for poor Angie. Her authority is even further compromised. I am not easy to replace. It was easier for her to be a gadfly counterpoint than it is for her to constructively lead now that she is in position. Yet her points and ideas are just as valid as they ever were. I offer to clean the wall and paint the message on a sign for the road, which is more appropriate anyway.

“Janet always was full of surprises in her early days,” says Mildred. “Running this place changed her.”

It is true. I remember some of my early activism. One university had a bust of the ‘Father’ of gynecology on campus. We put a bra on him and burned it. I even spent the night in jail for that one!

Being in jail gave me an idea. I went to city council and served an arrest warrant I had written for a citizen’s arrest for crimes against women. I held up a cardboard set of jail bars over the mayor’s face just as the reporter snapped the picture of some guy hauling me off. They did not jail me for that one but I was barred from city council meetings. They actually got a restraining order against me. It is still officially on the books. I visited the mayor in his retirement home years later as a volunteer, not on purpose. I visited lots of old folks. He just happened to be there and we played cribbage. When I told him I could be arrested for being there he just laughed and remembered, told me he thought I was clever for that ‘stunt’.

We had had posters made of the photo that ran in the newspaper that Sunday. We posted them around town, like wanted posters, offering a reward of a thousand dollars.

I wonder if they would roll over the files they have on us if they knew we could come back. Would the new little Janet, all ‘innocent’, an empty vessel to be instructed, a tabula

raza, a clear mirror (Buddhist or de Beauvoirian?), would she be held accountable for my past crimes. Would my tiny body be barred from going to school with whatever tiny body the dead mayor ended up in? What if it was my unborn brother's body? That would be some karmic scrambling indeed!

CHAPTER 7

A researcher has come to study the new community SAYWAC. When they told the registry of intentional communities that the new name had been invented by a child, there was some skepticism about the anarcho-synaptic vocabulary being age appropriate. This researcher Betty is secretly looking at how groups survive the loss of a guru, but she says she is looking at how they 'renegotiate their collective purpose'. This is why I never let researchers come in my day.

Betty claims she was in a community once. It was some sort of student Co-op in Chicago called Qmbaya. They paid rent and the kids came and went. What was the intent? It was an experiment in communal living perhaps but then so were the dorms. In many ways Betty who is older- late thirties maybe- and finishing her Doctorat (perhaps at our expense) still seems like an undergraduate student girl. Of course I am still carrying around my paper dolls in a tin Spiderman lunchbox so what can I say?

Betty has political agendas out the wazoo. She is glad Julie the man-lover is gone (she says nothing of the lesbians) and would never dare say so but strongly disapproves of Krista's

article. Still, one must not speak ill of the dead, so instead she has a whole questionnaire aimed at exorcising my ghost-the ghost of Janet.

HAHAHAHA I cackle to everyone's surprise.

She says to Carol that she ought to still use Carolina and be proud of her Hispanic heritage, not let it be cut off with this diminutive whitened little Christmas song name: 'carol'.

"No me importa ni un carajo," says Carol.

"What does that mean?" asks Betty.

"Exactly," says Carol. Moon giggles despite herself, Betty storms off, and Moon goes after her to make her apologies. She is used to apologizing for Carol but Carol does not mind and almost wishes I had stayed in public school so she could have had more fights with the larger society.

"We are going to have control of whatever you print about us, be it in mass press publications or small research papers or conferences- everything. We retain veto rights. Agree to that and I do not care what you do with your questionnaire methods wise and whatnot," Angie stipulates.

Betty has no choice but to agree. To her credit she stays seven months with us which is the longest any of us can remember anybody staying who did not live at the Farm. She does her chores just like anyone else. She takes an interest in my schoolwork and Mildred's art. Mildred is a wood carver.

Along the way we learn very little about Betty however. She is very secretive about herself although it is clear that she does not like men. It cannot have been her father who hurt her. He abandoned her mother while she was pregnant. It cannot have been a lover. Betty says she has always been a lesbian, never bi, and more like asexual lately.

Of course I am always sent out of the room when these conversations happen which just interests me all the more in the mysteries.

I can see the books and understand the concepts and organs involved but I admit I have no memories of these things yet and I do have a weird feeling about this absence, like a shame or a yearning. I am not sure.

CHAPTER 8

Doug and I are on the porch on a Summer night. He is reading me poetry by Blake. We are watching the fireflies over the hills. I want to go catch some but he is feeling lazy. I bring him a cup of coffee and an empty jar for me.

But I am impatient. After only five minutes- his coffee has not even cooled- I run off down the hill and he feels obliged to follow.

The fireflies are very big and bright but surprisingly difficult to catch. They float enticingly until one gets near then dart deftly away. They seem to know my reach as well. They often hover at a height just above my head.

Doug is laughing hilariously watching me jumping up with my empty jar swinging wildly around me.

“But still,” he finally says.

I do and soon they are all around me. In fact they are landing on me. I am transfixed. I completely forget that I have a jar. There are so many that I can see the ones which are not lit up by the light of the ones that are!

Slowly and silently I unscrew the jar lid which I had superstitiously screwed on in an attempt to persuade them that I meant no harm. They seem to have bought it.

But I still cannot catch one. I am impatient and jerk the jar and they fly away. One I hit with jar. I hope she is okay. Finally Doug comes and with his open hand gently urges a firefly towards the open jar approaching in his other hand.

You got it! You got one!

He screws the lid on and hands the jar to me. Inside is my very own firefly, not lit up though. I wait barely daring to breath until I see her light up inside the jar.

Can I keep him?

“Did you poke air holes in the jar lid?” Doug asks.

I had not.

“It would not have lived long anyway, in there,” Doug assures me.

Reluctantly I run down to the stream which I decide is the perfect place to let the firefly go even though all her firefly buddies are up on the hill for some reason. Frogs?

I want one more look in the jar before I lose my prize but to my horror it is a fetus I see in the jar. I know in my heart that it is Doug’s.

I drop the jar and run as fast as I can. I run and run until I collide- hard!- with a thick but see-through barrier. I turn aside and run another direction but come across the same barrier.

I starts running around the inside of the barrier which is smooth to the touch and I seen realize, rounded. The barrier

describes a giant circle around me and extends up as high as I can reach. It is clear I am in a jar!

CHAPTER 9

I am sweating like crazy! It really is Summer and there really are lots of fireflies as I see when I run out for air. Old as I am and am not I want human company. I am scared.

I go into the kitchen where I hear voices. Angie is in there with Mildred making tea and sitting at the table playing checkers with Moon is Wolfie.

“Hiya, honey! Did you forget about me?” the wolf asks.

CHAPTER 10

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah! After that the wolf nightmares came constantly, but not regularly every night. My period started and soon I deduced that the wolf came around half way through my cycle.

With my period came all my sexual memories.

My first time (unless you count dear old dad who never went quite that far) was with a boy in college. I was a late bloomer. Not like this time- my period at ten years old! The literature says the girls are getting them younger and younger but we eat no meat with hormones on the Farm!

Anyway, Ted let us say his name was. I cannot remember. I was wearing some complicated clothes which took him a long time. I never thought of helping him, poor guy. We were both a little drunk I think, on wine. We had had dinner. It was not sordid. There were candles. It was not special either, but I was relieved to have begun at last the great adventure I still thought it would be. It never did get much better than that although I learned later to take control. It did not hurt, just seemed a bit... athletic. Soon it was all hum drum to me. I made up quickly for a slow start, not just with Ted either.

One reason it did not hurt me is that I had already prepared myself, not for his sake, lord no, for my own- with a candle in fact! Throughout life I always found this method more satisfying than men. I never tried women. But I do not feel the urge yet this time around.

One thing I do recall is how silly I thought the male apparatus was. I think many of my spiritual sisters were scared of the thing. I knew right away I could make it dance to my tune. I had seen them in photos of course but having Ted's to do with as I wanted and use as my own was a laugh. I am not sure he appreciated. He was self-conscious. I had not the heart to tell him it was my first time. Everyone takes it all too seriously.

Maybe I am not passionate enough but I am not intellectualizing those wolf nightmares. They scare the shit out of me! I wonder what Virginia law on the pill is. I want to start as soon as possible, not for boys but to regulate my period and maybe make the wolf go away.

Moon is embarrassed when I tell her about my first period. I do not think she is prepared.

I know about boys too.

I had to tell her or there would be another war with Moon accusing god knows who of stealing her pads.

In Jungian dream analysis every part of the dream is considered a part of one's self. If that is true, which part of me is the wolf? Which part is the firefly? The fetus? The jar? The giant jar? The hill? The Farm?

Is my jar half empty or half full? All in all I would say life is good. I like it better second (third? forth?) time around. The Farm is not prospering, true, with the garden just about surviving and the animals going to pot. We are small but with Betty here it has been a bit better. Things are better I

admit with Moon and Carol out of the closet and Julie gone
and Krista off everyone's hands. Best of all I do not feel
responsible for any of it! The only problem is...
The Wolf.

CHAPTER 11 angie

What do you consider the main strengths of your community and how do they manifest themselves? Please provide concrete examples looking at the role each member played.

What do you consider the community's major challenges at present and what challenges have you overcome in the past?

What circumstances led your community to change leadership? What degree of discomfort has the change in leadership caused and how do you measure it?

What has changed since the founder/leader's leaving?
What have been the least and most difficult transitions?

What new opportunities have been presented by your community's change in leadership? Be specific.

What new roles have you been asked to play?
How have the roles of other members changed?

What original purposes of the community do you consider it essential for the community to maintain?

What are some of the new directions would you like to see the community explore? Please prioritize them.

Who would be supportive and unsupportive of the above initiatives and why? What steps can you take to enlist others in your vision to direct the community?

Please evaluate each member's leadership style and identify your own leadership style as well as which leadership styles you most and least prefer to interact with and why.

CHAPTER 12 mildred

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CHAPTER 13 carol

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CHAPTER 14 moon

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CHAPTER 15 janet

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CHAPTER 16

I am my old self. That is to say I am old. I am not that old!
But I am no longer a child. I cast off the water wings.

I am swimming in the pond but it is larger than the real one
and very quiet. The ducks all fly off at my approach.

It is not my approach they flee. There is something else
they fear.

The wolf is swimming in the pond with me, very near!

Wolfie, good Woolfie. Go to shore! Go!!

Wolfie keeps coming.

He wants to taste me with his rough tongue!

I swim for shore fast as I can calling for help but the water is
thick and the shore so far away and I can see no one.

Wolfie is nearer and nearer an

CHAPTER 17

Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

“It’s okay, honey. It is just a dream. It is not real. Was it the wolf again? Did you try telling it to be friends the way mommy Carol said? No, that’s okay.” Moon holds me.

I am crying. I cannot speak. I cannot think. I know now that I want to live. I definitely want to live.

“Shhh, honey. Today we are having a big party! Do you want to come help me make a cake?”

She takes me down to the kitchen where Mildred is washing vegetables. Mildred kisses my forehead.

“Bad dream again?” Mildred asks. No reply. “Janet, it will be okay.” Mildred speaks to me like an adult, like Janet.

I calm down. Today I remember is the divorce party for Carol and George. Carol got her green card! That means Julie will be coming. I am glad. I miss her more than Krista, more than even my old self. Or is it just that I do not want her to have left on bad terms now that we have

Mildred back? I have stopped asking myself all these questions. I know. I want everyone to be okay.

Will Doug come?

Angela comes in. “I have an announcement, well, a question I guess. I want to add to our celebration. Betty has finished her research but has decided not to submit it. In fact she has already burned it along with all her findings. She has asked to stay on here and live with us on the Farm. I told her I had to clear it with you all. Carol said ‘fine’. Any objections?”

“She lives here already! Of course!” Mildred agrees.

“The more the merrier,” Moon claps.

Nobody waits for my approval.

It’s a party!

Carol knows how to play guitar and plays folk songs while Moon and I dance with maracas and tambourines and drums and bells. Mildred is in her rocker talking to Julie while George visits with Doug.

Doug has come. I realize how self-centered I had always been as a kid, hell, as an adult too- I have never asked him a very important question.

He brings me the juice I ask for and I ask him-

Douglas, why did you never have kids yourself?

He is getting older.

“My wife does not want any.”

“Wife?! You have a wife?!”

I burst into tears and run from the room out into the forest. They cannot find me for hours. I am resolved to sleep out there sulking. I ruined the party. My son is married. I have never met her. Now I am a child to her. It is all so mixed up. Plus I have all these teenage hormones going.

Mildred finds me.

Why does she never come to the Farm?

I mean the wife.

“Doug says she hates us without knowing us, that all he tells her is positive but she thinks we are a cult and killed you. In fact Doug begged her come tonight. He does not like to bring it up or talk about her here. He is unresolved about your death still.”

I will go to her...

CHAPTER 18

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