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SINISTER WISDOM

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SINISTER WISDOM 3

*a journal
of words and
pictures for
the lesbian
imagination in
all women.*

Catherine Nicholson
Harriet Desmoines, editors

Cover photograph by Tee Corinne

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3116 Country Club Drive
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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

If you have just opened this journal and are wondering whether to buy it, or if you have already bought it and are wondering whether to read it, here are some hors d'oeuvres to whet your appetite:

"Do I hate the 20th century? Someone suggested (with horror) that I am a shocking, unregenerate, and socially unuseful combination of the 19th and 21st centuries. I don't find that so bad." (page 11)

"Fear. Fear is an incredibly powerful political reality. And the degree to which we hardly talk about it, indicates the degree to which we are lying about it." (page 12)

"Whenever I hear this race-species-superiority trip it makes me sick. When I hear it from lesbians, it makes me want to a) throw up, b) go straight and have babies, c) abandon the human race and be a hermit." (page 14)

"Mary, Mary quite contrary
to oedipal expectations
grows silver bells
in her garden" (page 53)

"Our universe of discourse has only begun to expand, evolving out of our struggles and exploration, and much of our language is still in quotation marks." (page 94)

"Self-realizing women are not mental hermaphrodites, Earth mothers, yin, androgynes, free animae relating to their animi, "in touch with their bisexual nature." (page 44)

"When we meet again
will you put your hands upon me
will I ride you over our lands
will we sleep beneath trees in the rain?" (page 5)

"It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between woman and woman." (page 7)

COMING HOME

I. UNBOUND

Fear hits up hard
closing a wooden door.
The Girl leaves to go where
to do what
is going to--will--happen to her
to us. Nothing.

Mamie, old and more than half dead,
her mouth like the black hole she was headed for,
cried in her craziness:
"I think I am my mother
I never thought it before."

They leave me. I leave me.
A door dissects us.
Daughter, mother,
unbound
we shatter.

II. WITHDRAWAL

Empty, interrupted, a thread scatters,
the warm hues of the drug gone and the dream aborted,
the charge leaving her feeble-vacant, cleft.
Let her hide.

Now what happens happens unmitigated.
Decomposing, the bright falls away
in the ritual thrust, vile-violent.
Fuelless, bound in both directions,
the empty force exists and the hole is nothing.

Spurts of light go off like spansules in her veins.
The reds and golds put her a puzzle together.
Not back together.
Back in a long left country
inside a round of grey and brown-gold
the out unable to bring its ice cubes in
to the circumference of darkening fire and feast.

Once at the beach she remembered being born:
"It was all burnt red and blue, dark, like I had become
the bone of a chicken's leg in an oven
or a wish-bone."
No one believed it.
And again in the winter when the girl was born.
Nesting. Entombed for a while.

III. MOTHERLAND

My unreal mother dead for too long,
replaced now by the site warming, holding, rocking
in a circle, an orb in an orb.
Creator created, the ground her body.
The dry soil, the sun, the sweater I wear
mother me.
At rest, I sink and forget.
She is the whole, big, old, and simple.
Be kind and beware.
To lose again is too much gone,
with one shot one kick too many.
Her breath and pockets like gin, tobacco-ry unclean
surfaces/depths.
The flame catches, the blast a terror in her absence.
If she is gone I am fear
and see her lover stalking through greenhouses,
a dirt giant his boots in the mud
amazed and doomed.
Then the blue motherless child is blessed
charged with the mystery, the murderous ray,
the bad weather one startled into a dance
by the hard neon color of everything enduring and mixed.
The sun is the hot cobalt mother.

The cotton and wool hard rock me.
The words on the page comfort me.
The air bringing us together out of infinite confusion,
the needles in the sky, the purple grasses, the full
silent place
filling the grave, comfort me.
In a globe a fine bubble surfaces.
The unknown known.

IV. HOLY MOTHERS

The audacity of it,
rising and falling in a sacred place
like mice in her cavernous belly.
In her presence saying, "Father."
Mother Margaret, wisdom-goddess-grandmother
embalmed in the Abbey,
sleeping in stone,
holding us scholars and widows
in your hands ancient and blackened to bones,
asleep in the body of a chapel that glows like new fruit,
mirroring in gold the souls of girls and crones,

one of our dead Mothers, realer than the live.
But some like Virginia, pale wrinkled Ariel,
not comforted by the Bloomsbury rector
but by the ice water
made real by the loss of it.
Or the one who loves age come to us late and still
unwelcome,
the God of old women like ourselves, a nun of sorts,
raised in the night laughing and promising a stone chapel,
privately entombing the three,
our mothers, our daughters, our selves.

-Judith Jones

TO THE DAUGHTER I BECAME WHO GAVE BIRTH TO THE MOTHER
I NEEDED

The woman
I needed to call my mother
was silenced before I was born.

Your two hands grasping your head
drawing it down against the blade of life
your nerves the nerves of a midwife
learning her trade.

Adrienne Rich

A mother who croons an epic lullabye,
I rock you in my arms, for all
The years I lived before I bore you.
Daughter, when you became part of this air
I had already learned to apologize,
To dread what I feared I couldn't do.

I have lived those failures
Before you were born.
Before I met you
I cried at five years old,
Terrified by the complex twisting of my name
The day in school I had to use the alphabet.

At ten
I waited a week
For the drug store to develop
Pictures from the miniature camera
Bought for a dollar on the street.