



Humor

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## Notes For a Magazine

We are pleased to present two dossiers within this issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. When we took on the editorship of *Sinister Wisdom*, we realized that there were many talented editors in our community who couldn't take on the responsibility of producing a full issue of the journal, as had been the guest editor practice in the past. So, we agreed to approach people about editing special, topical "dossiers." We envisioned these between twenty-five and sixty pages in length. We are thrilled with the outcome of this approach and present a dossier on humor, edited by Chocolate Waters, and a dossier on youth, edited by Liz Bradbury and Merry Gangemi.

The dossier of writing from young lesbians, edited by Liz Bradbury and Merry Gangemi, contains seven exciting pieces by four young lesbians. One of our goals when we assumed the editorship of *Sinister Wisdom* was to reenergize the magazine by introducing new voices and finding new readers to enjoy the work of lesbian art and culture. We believe that this dossier is one step in that direction, but more importantly we hope you will enjoy the fine writing included in this section of *Sinister Wisdom*. We were thrilled to collaborate with Liz Bradbury to make this dossier a reality and thank her profusely for sharing her editorial gifts with the *Sinister Wisdom* community.

The other dossier is on humor and edited by the inestimable Chocolate Waters. This dossier is filled with new voices and returning voices to *Sinister Wisdom*. Humor is a tricky subject, of course. We found ourselves disagreeing about what is funny and what isn't in reviewing submissions and enjoyed many provocative conversations about pieces included in this section of *Sinister Wisdom*. We hope that you as readers find in the humor dossier items that are funny, delightful, provocative, ticklish, and challenging. We have come to appreciate how humor helps us to understand our world and define our values by editing this issue.

You'll find a few other gems in this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* in addition to its unusual layout. Selma Miriam and Noel Furie weigh in on vegetarianism and veganism in response to a book review we ran last year, Joanne Passet contributes a powerful essay about the life and work of the legendary Barbara

Grier, and Ruth Mountaingrove returns with reviews of recent lesbian books.

We have a special and exciting issue planned for the summer, with more information about it when it arrives in your mailbox, and an open issue planned for the fall. We already have some fantastic writing and artwork for that issue, but will continue to read for it through July 1, 2012. Feel free to send submissions to us for the fall issue.

Finally, volunteers stepping up to assist with the work of *Sinister Wisdom* bless us. In the past few months, we have been thankful for the assistance of Grace Sikorski and Joanna Cattamor in a variety of editorial tasks and Maggie Schleich in fundraising. We continue to be grateful for the work of Susan Levinkind as our office manager. Susan's work and commitment to *Sinister Wisdom* is extraordinary and we treasure her friendship. Sue Lencarts deftly manages the *Sinister Wisdom* website and our PayPal account. Susan and Judith Witherow recently celebrated the first anniversary of their legal marriage and their partnership of thirty-six years. We are grateful to both of them for their contributions to *Sinister Wisdom*. Many of our readers made generous contributions to *Sinister Wisdom* at the end of 2011. We appreciate your financial support. Subscriptions are one small part of our financial support for the magazine and we appreciate your confidence in *Sinister Wisdom* as a project for lesbian art and culture.

Do you want to get involved with *Sinister Wisdom*? We particularly need graphic designers to assist with the production of the magazine as well as designing graphics for advertising and the website. We are also looking for someone to help us set up online sales of *Sinister Wisdom*. We welcome all contributions of time and energy to *Sinister Wisdom*, so if you want to join in the fun, email us and let us know. We appreciate your involvement.

In Sisterhood,

Julie R. Enszer  
Merry Gangemi  
March 2012

## Notes for a Magazine - Youth

More than a year ago, I asked Liz Bradbury if she would be interested in editing a youth dossier for an issue of *Sinister Wisdom*. I asked her because I had a window into the work Liz does with Pennsylvania Diversity Network, an amazing and powerfully dynamic organization that directly serves the queer communities of Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley and Berks County, and by virtue of the internet, reaches the entire state (and beyond).

The work in this issue is dynamic and incredibly courageous, and the letters and words of these young lesbians reflect back the blood, sweat, and tears of our successful march closer to full equal rights. Created within the context of diversity and personal practices, the work offers us opportunities to throw the doors and windows of lesbian experience wide open to new and different perspectives and ideas. I am thrilled that Liz solicited these narratives and poems, dramas, and essays. And I’m thrilled with the result.



Photo Credit: Liz Bradbury

In Liz’s own words: “The four young women writing about Lesbian themes in this issue are from remarkably diverse racial, international, religious, educational, cultural, and regional backgrounds. These writers are from places as fundamentally different as Cairo, Egypt; Madison, Wisconsin; Houston, Texas; and Tangier, Morocco. They have religious sensibilities as divergent as Atheist, Catholic, and Muslim. Yet in their unique voices, these writers offer a unifying vision of their multifarious Lesbian experience, expressed in joy, fear, humor, bravery, lust, and love. This microcosm of young Lesbian writers shows not only their

individual skill, but the inspiring collective voice of their generation.”

Merry Gangemi  
March 2012

## **Where To Find Sinister Wisdom**

Antigone Books (Tucson, AZ)  
Bear Pond Books (Montpelier, VT)  
Bloodroot (Bridgeport, CT)  
Bluestockings Bookstore (New York, NY)  
Giovanni's Room (Philadelphia, PA)  
Galaxy Books (Hardwick, VT)  
In Other Words (Portland, OR)  
Goddard College Library (Plainfield, VT)  
Laurel Book Store (Oakland, CA)  
Dartmouth Barnes and Noble (Hanover, NH)  
Wild Iris Books (Gainesville, FL)

Our list of places to find *Sinister Wisdom* is growing! Join the *Sinister Wisdom* Community Distribution Network and help spread the work of Sinister Wisdom. More information is available at [www.SinisterWisdom.org](http://www.SinisterWisdom.org) and on our Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/SinisterWisdom>.

## Sunburned

**Sarah Kersh**

I keep my hands knotted  
deep inside my sweater,  
feeling like a skinned knee slowly turning red.

Red like the sun through my eyelids.  
The sun in whose rays I soak,  
lying in the backyard at seventeen  
touching skin, looking for pink  
turning white, turning  
pink again.

I can't wait for you  
to move with me.  
I don't know how to be still—

I know motion  
like tides which suck away the sands and then bring them back to  
the shore  
where we inspect each other's shoulders  
for tan lines.  
Loving the simple slope of your back as you lie with your face in a  
book,  
gently being ravished by the sun.

In this cold I wear layers to hide  
white skin— fish belly white.  
Fish like those whose carcasses we ran from as girls,  
pinching our noses, looking  
instead for sand dollars,  
bleached by the sun.  
The two of us bending and standing  
bending and standing  
Moving down the beach and back again.

Inside, our eyes adjusted to the artificial light,  
We move around the table inspecting our finds.

My sweater falls open and you notice  
how red I am.

## **Sea Fairy**

**Sarah Kersh**

On two bicycles—  
forgotten  
and rusted—  
we circled the island.

Your hair,  
curled beach grass  
and sun,  
streaming behind you.  
And I,  
a love-struck  
Apollo, straining  
to catch you.

## **My Lover**

*Translated from Arabic*

**Sarah J**

I turned, I saw him running towards me.  
Running, and running, eager to kiss me.  
His view of the treasure of love and longing,  
His voice, desperate for his sweetheart.

Frozen, sinking in a dream of sadness...  
I felt his warm love and I felt grief...  
I was saddened and said to him:  
"I do not love you! I'm not your lover!"  
He heard me, his face showed shock  
he frowned under its weight.

He approached. Nearer. He stared into my soul.  
Everything in his mind changed forever and he went away.  
And in that night ...  
Committed suicide ...

I loved him with all my senses  
But ...  
With all my heart  
But ...  
Our conversations, The companionship  
But ...

I respected him  
But ...  
But I ... I loved her!  
Rainbow of my life  
She raised me up to life.  
She colored away the boredom and sorrows of my days.  
Accepted and exploded ...

The Sky opened at the sound of her voice,  
The Sea rose from her passion  
My Universe exploded!

What more beautiful than a woman?  
What is superior to a virgin?  
What is greater than Eve?

She loves me! Unbearable joy!  
She loves me and I love her.  
She is my rose ... And I am hers!  
But ...

But she is a woman...  
Is it a sin loving a woman?  
I may be jailed and hated because of my love for her.  
I will kill this love, or be killed?  
Why should I die for the crime of love?

I deserve hell because she is a woman?  
I changed myself, I froze my feelings.  
The silent screams of my heart cut off my breath...  
My own soul, denied the right to life!  
Because I had committed an unforgivable sin.  
Not just a crime, but blasphemy.

Although I loved  
But ... love  
But it was a woman.  
Many before me have died for love.  
But ...

For the world, my family, and my Lord,  
I buried my love ...  
Yet, it tears me inside,  
in the deepest part of my soul.

She has gone...  
But ... she stays in my hear.  
In my mind, in my memories, and my fantasies ...  
She has gone but she stays inside me.  
And...

She stays in my pen.

## Truth or Love

### Hannah Mesouani

"Love and Truth" by Mother, Mother plays whilst the audience enters and fades as the lights rise.

Scene 1: Outside a prison in Ksar el Kbir, Morocco.  
Bare sand-coloured stage, large brown door with metal handles downstage centre. A young woman in a bright orange kaftan struggles with a crowd of three police officers dressed in light blue uniforms. One of them wields a baton and strikes her once the curtain rises; she falls.

**Layla:** I did NOTHING wrong!! Let me go, in the name of Allah, you have no right to touch me let alone strike me!

**Police Officer 1:** (wielding baton again) Silence! Filth. You have not only violated the sacred laws of Allah but have violated Article 489 of the Moroccan Penal Code.

**Police Officer 2:** (kicking Layla as she attempts to stand up) Unnatural animal, did God not make woman for man? You disgrace your people and your gender.

**Layla:** I love Nour! There is no disgrace in love! Allah teaches compassion— (she is struck again)

**Police Officer 3:** You are in no position to speak of Islam, infidel. Did Allah show compassion to the people of Lot? Sodomites, male or female, shall be rightly punished. As shall you.

**Police Officer 1:** Adam was for Eve, and she for Adam. One sex is for the other. What you have done is disgusting! (spits)

**Layla:** I am not! I'm in love, we're in love, more than sisters, more than I could ever love any man—

**Police Officer 2:** Any man? What does your father have to say to this?

**Police Officer 1:** Has he been notified?

**Police Officer 3:** I shall fetch him. Take her inside until the judge has come. She will learn nothing crawling on the streets. (to Layla) Your fun has ended, you will see how we deal with those that taint our faith and corrupt our people. Go!

Police Officer 3 exits stage right as the others drag Layla through the centre stage door.

**Scene 2:** (transition music for all scenes is "I know I love I see I go" by Rainbow Arabia)

Inside a quiet, dimly-lit prayer room of a mosque.

Two women, dressed in an orange kaftan and jeans and a T-shirt respectively, are embracing passionately near one of the prayer mats.

**Layla:** (pulling away from Nour, the other girl) No, we shouldn't, you said we came here to just "hang out."

**Nour:** (grinning, pulling Layla closer) Well, Layla, we're "hanging out" aren't we?

**Layla:** We can't....you know, in the mosque though...it's...

**Nour:** (pushing Layla back, frowning) It's what? Don't tell me you're going to buy all their "sinner" talk. I thought you loved me for me, naughty bits and all, eh?

**Layla:** No, I mean, well, of course I do, love, it's just....you know, a mosque, even heterosexuals shouldn't....you know....

**Nour:** Of course not, you're right. (an awkward silence) NOT! (laughs and jumps on top of Layla, kissing her again.)

**Layla:** (abandoning her religious stance and giving in) You're perfect you know that?

**Nour:** Nope, that's only God, remember?

**Layla:** You know what I mean.

- Nour:** (smiles) Yeah. You're not half bad yourself. I love you, you know.
- Layla:** I do...it's just....
- Nour:** (cynically raising an eyebrow and folding her arms) Quoi? Dare I ask?
- Layla:** Nour, I want to be with you. For real. Forever.
- Nour:** You're going all gooey on me again, aren't you?
- Layla:** If I was a man I would have married you already—or vice versa. But how can we? Ever? We'd be stoned or something before we were even heard out...
- Nour:** You remember last year, those two men caught at their own marriage ceremony. Arrested. Assaulted. We can't be stupid and publicize this. I'm not dressing up like a man or anything either or changing my name or growing out my beard or scratching myself in public or—(they laugh)
- Layla:** (pulling Nour closer to her) One day they'll all get it. If they could see us together like those couples on your television...America and all those other places are letting gay people marry. Women, too.
- Nour:** Well, sweetheart, I wouldn't hold your breath. (they snuggle) My father's Spanish ambassador, and deals with gay like it was his business. (Nour plays with Layla as she describes the following) You know those Spanish boys—greased up hair, tight shirts, orange skin...holding hands and kissing (they kiss)...and Papa smiles through it all daily... but I'd still never dream of telling him I like girls.
- Layla:** I know...(sighs)...I suppose we'll just have to wait it out. We have each other though.
- Nour:** You're straight out of Disney, aren't you?
- Layla:** Out of what?
- Nour:** Never mind, it's one of my Spanish-things.
- Layla:** You're so wise. You know what it's like outside of this dusty town with it's broken milk pails and goat farms and all the rest of it.

- Nour:** (laughing) Hey, never underestimate the goat—
- Layla:** (earnest) No, really. Take me out of here. \*beat\* Can't you, please? The next time you have to accompany your father to Spain on business. Just say I'm your companion, or your mai—
- Nour:** (still laughing) I love your optimism. It's not that easy even over there. Plus what would I say? "Salaam dad, here's my girl, she and I want to do it on the other side of the Med, see how the other half live"? I don't think so, lovie. (kisses her on the forehead)
- Layla:** (brushes kiss aside) But why not? I could work or something. Or what if I... \*sighs\*....oh, I don't know...
- Nour:** We've been through this. Getting across the Straits requires a skillset you don't have, money you'll never see, and connections that won't get you skinned alive if made public.
- Layla:** (openly frustrated) I know, I know, I KNOW! (tense silence as Layla shuffles moodily to the other end of the prayer mat)
- Nour:** (inching tentatively towards Layla) Baby, Layla.....cherie...you know I'd get you out of here if I could....(Layla remains silent)...Sweetie...come on, being upset won't change the future or the past, all that does is spoil the here and now. C'mon, (she takes off her T-shirt revealing a sexy lace bra) look what I got on my last trip out of here....(Layla does not turn around) I'll get you one next time around...who knows? Maybe you'll be there to pick it out with me, eh?
- Layla:** (turning) Whatever, yeah, ri—(stops short seeing the bra, smiles)—get over here, you. (They embrace again. Lights dim.)

**Scene 3:** Bare courtroom. Judge's podium, defendant's chair, lawyer's chair and a half dozen wooden chairs for witnesses and police officers.

**Judge:** Layla Bensouda, this court, in the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, finds you guilty of acts of lewdness and homosexual perversity. You are thus facing a chance of 3 years of imprisonment. You were found in a sacred place of worship with a partially undressed member of the same sex, with whom you were engaging in unnatural sexual acts ... against her will.

**Layla:** (shocked) Against her will?! WHAT??

**Judge:** Do you deny that at the time of intervention by the imam, you were on top of the victim, Nour Al-Harsha?

**Layla:** It wasn't against anybody's will, she LOVES me.

**Judge:** According to this statement, made by Miss Al-Harsha, who I need not remind you is the daughter of a much respected ambassador to Spain, she says that you lured her into the mosque under the false pretenses of prayer and then proceeded to undress her and force her to model a disgusting example of Western perversity in the form of exhibit A, a lace brassiere that you somehow, most probably, illegally acquired.

**Layla:** What?? No—that was HERS. She already had it on, she willingly undressed herself, (smiles to herself briefly) not for the first time—Shi—I mean— (stops herself realizing her mistake as the courtroom erupts into shouts of outrage)

**Judge:** Aha! So you wish to confirm that this was not the first time you—

**Layla:** Stop it! Give me time, Let me think—

**Judge:** Give you time to think of lies?

**Layla:** No, fine! You want the whole story? I'll tell—

**Judge:** Silence, woman! You will listen to what—

**Layla:** That's unfair, it's my neck on the line. Surely I—

**Judge:** (ignoring Layla) Moving on, Miss Bensouda. Do you deny that your intent upon entering the mosque was to perform sexual acts with the lady in question? Limit your responses to a strict “yes”

- or “no”, if you will.
- Layla:** \*beat\* No.
- Judge:** Do you have feelings of a sexual nature for the ambassador’s daughter?
- Layla:** I LO—
- Judge:** “Yes” or “No.”
- Layla:** (defeated) Yes.
- Judge:** Had you not been interrupted, would you have carried out your intended acts.
- Layla:** Yes.
- Judge:** You are aware, are you not, that it is not only religiously condemned, but legally forbidden for members of the same sex to interact thus.
- Layla:** (sighing) Yes, I am.
- Judge:** Do you have anything to say in your defense.
- Layla:** \*pause\* ...You need four witnesses. Yes! If you’re abiding by the Qu’ran, it says you need four witnesses to adultery, only one imam walked in, you can't touch me! In the name of Allah, and His law, you cannot prosecute me.
- Judge:** But as a woman, your testimony is only worth half that of a man.
- Layla:** Unfair! You're twisting His words as you always do! It clearly states that I am more than allowed to def—
- Judge:** (louder) Miss Al-Harsha clearly states that you were attempting to force yourself upon her.
- Layla:** SHE DID NOT!
- Judge:** I’m afraid it says so (holding up Nour’s statement sheet) right over here.
- Layla:** Well, she wouldn’t. She couldn’t have! She told me just today that she loved me and she was going to get me out of here—away from sexist, close-minded morons like—you mutilate the Qu'ran for your own
- Judge:** MISS BENDSOUDA. Do you really think you are helping your case any by insulting me? I’m the only man who stands between you and 3 years for sodomy, and infinitely longer for rape.

**Layla:** No, no...no! You have no power over me. You have to abide by the Shari'a , the law—our RELIGION—all of whi—

**Judge:** All of which condemn you, as shall I.

Scene 4: Back in the mosque with Layla and Nour.  
Nour is topless and has just finished “going down on” Layla underneath her kaftan.

**Nour:** (smiling) Who wants virgins in paradise, right?

**Layla:** (laughing hesitantly) You can't say things like that in here. (she looks concernedly around her)

**Nour:** Just like you can't moan your heart out on a prayer mat, right? Speaking of which, I should probably not be naked right now, it's almost dusk, the men will be in to pray maghrib in a little while.

**Layla:** Don't you want me to return the favour?

**Nour:** Hell yeah, but I want a cigarette first. (she reaches into her pockets for a packet and lighter)

**Layla:** Oh God, Nour! They'll smell that! And it's disgusting women aren't supposed to smoke!

**Nour:** Hey, you can smell sex, too. And “women aren't supposed to...” Really? You're such a little village girl. I don't care how many girls you end up doing, that'll never change. \*smiles\*

**Layla:** I know...I'm sorry. I'm just not as experienced or worldly as you. Besides, I won't be “doing girls”, only you—I'm with you, forever, right? That's what we said.

**Nour:** Yeah, forever. \*lights up a cigarette\* You know though, I'm leaving back to Spain tomorrow. I told you that right?

**Layla:** Oh... but you'll be back thought, right? I'll just wait for you my darling. \*reaches for her hand\*

**Nour:** I'm sure you'll find other distractions. A nice village boy for a change, maybe? (playfully shoves Layla and puts on bra with the cigarette

between her lips)  
**Layla:** God forbid, no! Not after....well, you know.  
(tense silence) Anyway, I don't need  
"distractions"....You won't be... "distracted" in  
Spain...\*beat\* will you?  
**Nour:** Er, not at all. You know me. I love you, you  
know. We're good.  
**Layla:** But.....?  
**Nour:** Well, see....here's the thing, sugar, I'm going to  
be straight with you...haha, "straight". Anyways,  
I don't know how long I'm going to be in Spain  
this next time exactly, you know, my dad and all  
that ambassador stuff he's always doing. He  
needs me there.

**Layla:** How do you help him? I wish you could train me  
so I could join you....  
**Nour:** No training, I just fulfill the role of obedient  
daughter, you know, make him look like the  
respectable Muslim dad he isn't. It's a sweet deal,  
really, except for all the skeezy men he's telling  
me to marry. Boost his image and all that. Scary  
thing, marriage, eh? (mutters) Can't believe it's  
happening.  
**Layla:** Happening?  
**Nour:** Oh, I mean, you know, all the talk of...who he  
thinks I should be with....  
**Layla:** You wouldn't though....you love me....me,  
right?  
**Nour:** Heck yeah, all the way. Now less of this talking  
business, and let's get down to some fun before  
maghrib and all that hijab-ness, eh?  
**Layla:** Nour...don't mock my—  
**Nour:** shhh....get over her \*they kiss\*

**Scene 5:** Back in the courtroom.

**Judge:** It is now time for you to make a statement, Miss

Bensouda. You have 5 minutes, please make it quick as I don't see what you could possibly say. Also be aware that anything slanderous said against the ambassador's daughter will no doubt increase the length of the already substantial jail sentence at which you are currently looking.

**Layla:** Well...Nour and I are together. We're engaged.

**Judge:** (laughing) Miss Bensouda, really. I think it more fitting for you to appear before a judge of mental health, perhaps a witch doctor to remove whatever it is that has possessed you to say such idiocies.

**Layla:** I'm not just saying it, it's true! We're in love!

**Judge:** (impatiently sighing) Go on then, lie more if you must.

**Layla:** It's the truth. I swear in the name of all the is Hol—

**Judge:** ENOUGH! I will not have you lie in the name of purity itself. Speak your lies but do not swear to them!

**Layla:** Nour and I were to be married.

**Judge:** Really? If that is so, then explain to me why Nour and the French ambassador's son are to be married in three weeks time? What have you to say to that?

**Layla:** (stunned into silence)

**Judge:** Yes. \*laughs\* I see that this actuality did not figure into the delusions of your mind. The marriage was arranged no less than a month ago, before her previous visit to our country and this very town. However, in light of your attempt at sullyng her virtue and your previous attacks upon Miss Al-Harsha's person, the French ambassador has put a hold on all marital procedures. You do realise, your vain attempts at some twisted Western romance, may well have jeopardised one of Morocco's most important political unions? Have you any remorse?

**Layla:** She was to be married...? She lied to me? She

told me she was like me, that she could never...(is disgusted)...surely this is against her will?!

**Judge:** Are you in any position to decide what is and isn't against Nour al-Harsha's will? This statement here confirms it.

**Layla:** Well, I don't believe you! It can't be true! You've forged it! I know you have! It's all because of those men last year who wanted to be married and you wouldn't let them. You're repeating it, to warn others, aren't you? You take what you want by force and corrupt anything pure—

**Judge:** Silence, you babbling idiot of a woman, corruption has spread, this much is true. But it is no fault of mine. Nour Al-Harsha has left this town with her father, away from you and your evils. She has condemned you with her words, just as you damn yourself with your own words. Face up to the fact at hand. You have gone against the will of Allah and will suffer for it in prison for a term no less than 5 and no more than 25 years. You will no longer be in any position to rape—

**Layla:** WHO ARE YOU TO TALK ABOUT RAPE??

**Judge:** Silence in the court!!!

**Layla:** NO! The women of this village have suffered at the hands of-of-deluded...self-righteous men for too long. Why don't you charge them with these accusations. You turn a blind eye to the women on the street who run past abuse, who hide from harassment and you turn away from the all the worse deeds that take place behind close doors. You're just one of them. THIS IS NOT CONDONED IN ANY QU'RAN THAT I'VE EVER READ.

**Judge:** What are you saying, girl? You are no scholar, learn your place!

**Layla:** This is NOT my place. This is not my country, it belongs to no woman. You're them. You're twisting everything I've said, everything the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said. I'm not lying here. You are. All of you. You're the lie and I don't know what's true anymore. I don't care to know. Just take me away, do with me what you will, it's not like you all haven't already. You've taken something so beautiful, and made it even uglier than you are.

**Scene 6:** Back in the mosque, couple exactly as they were in Scene 4.

**Layla:** I can't wait for you to come back. I'm going to miss you when you're gone.

**Nour:** (smiles) Me too.

**Layla:** I love you, you know.

**Nour:** I know.

**Layla:** I feel safe with you....and happy...  
(inch closer together to kiss)

**Nour:** (pause) I know...

(Hear Mother, Mother as the lights dim with their faces an inch apart)

**Curtain.**

## **She, Her, and the Spaghetti Sauce**

**A'Ja Lyons**

She awoke to Her movement. The familiar stirring of the start of Her morning ritual was like a gentle alarm. Like clockwork, She followed Her into the bathroom and joined into Their routine.

It was a divine silence between them. Their relationship had grown to where no words were needed. The clothes fell to the same spot on the tile. The shower was always the same temperature. Their lovemaking was always beautiful. It was not always the same, but always beautiful. She knew Her body; every freckle, ever bruise, every scar and every birthmark. She greeted every single one, and Her body was welcoming.

As they left the bathroom, they soothingly stroked and nudged each other, communicating more than any remark could say. The way She ran her hand over Her stomach spoke volumes.

They then walked into the kitchen and saw the broken jar and the spilled sauce on the floor and wall, the remnant of their fight last night. And then the lovely calm was broken and there were only words.

## Trailer Trash

**A'Ja R. Lyons**

I sat by the highway, waiting, just waiting. I normally wasn't one for patience, but I knew I wouldn't have to wait long. I slapped at the skeeters at the edge of my cutoffs and wiped the sweat off my face with my brother's muscle shirt.

Before I could blink a car came zooming across the way and ran over a raccoon. I waited until the traffic slowed, ran and got the coon, then ran down the hill. I held it by the tail. It hadn't been dead long enough to start stinking, so I guess it was just dirty. I wasn't too eager to have to wash the fur before I skinned it.

As I ran down the hill, I knew what the people in the cars were sayin;

“There goes that hilljack.”

“Another one of them no-good lazy trailer trash bastards wasting tax payer money.”

Some people were bold enough to yell it out their window.

I walked all the way down to Mama's trailer, and like always, my sister Mindy was sitting in Mama's chair watching the t.v. She sickened me something horrible.

“That all you could you find?” she sneered.

“If you don't like it get your lazy ass up and get your own damn self some food.” The only time Mindy ever left the trailer park was to find a guy to screw or get a new tattoo or some shit pierced. I'd bet my last five dollars that I didn't have that she had her cunt pierced. The thought made me want to hurl worse than the nasty raccoon that was in my hand. ‘Damn, I am my sister's keeper’ I thought.

I cleaned the coon, skinned it, and then chopped the parts up so I could fry them. We only had one skillet and it was just the two of us, so I went to put the rest in the tiny fridge in the corner.

When I opened the fridge, it was full of beer. We had so little money there was no way she had enough to buy a case of

beer.

“Where the hell did you get beer from? You stealin again?” I asked Mindy.

“No I didn’t steal again! And it’s none of your damn business where I get my shit!” she yelled.

“You don’t have any shit! This is Mama’s trailer, everything in here Mama bought! Your fat, lazy, hillbilly ass don’t do shit.”

“I’m sick of you ridin’ on my ass like you’re better!” She threw the raccoon tail at me.

I grabbed a beer from the fridge and threw it at her. I knew that’d piss her off something royal, and piss her off it did. Her eyes filled with hate and she ran at me like an angry pit-bull.

She dug her Lee Press-On Nails into my skin and I screamed as she clawed at my face. I kicked her in the stomach, and as she doubled over I pushed her out of the trailer. As she went down, she pulled me down with her.

We hit the ground and her nails dug into my shoulders. I grabbed her by the hair with my left hand, and slapped her with my right. The next thing I knew we were being pulled apart by the sheriff and his deputies and hauled into county.

“Trailer trash”, the deputies called us as they locked us in with ten other people. Half of them lived in the same trailers as me and Mindy. I now had become what I so despised.

## Vibrations

### A'Ja Lyons

"I don't feel like dancing," Leah moaned.

"Sure you do," Mari asserted.

"My feet hurt," Leah exaggerated.

"You're wearing flats," Mari sighed.

"These bangs are not a good look," Leah whined.

"Your eyes are popping, you look awesome," Mari assured.

Leah glanced around The Scratching Post, the newest lesbian bar in town, and saw the same old thing she'd seen at other bars—ladies dancing, cliques chatting, and drinking. Why she allowed Mari to continue dragging her to bars was an unknown. Mari was looking for love in all of the wrong places and every night her feelings got hurt, and Leah was always the one to pick up the pieces. Beat pounding, drinks pouring, all she could do was wonder which heartbreaker Mari would pick.

"I'm going to go talk to that redhead in the corner. Wish me luck!" Mari giggled.

Leah sighed and wondered when Mari would grow out of her masochistic tendencies. Two years and she'd yet to develop good taste in women or learn how to approach them. Mari soon returned with a familiar brooding expression.

"How'd it go?" Leah asked.

"I forgot I hate redheads," Mari sulked.

Leah pulled her into a one armed hug and suggested they call it a night.

"What? No! Oh come on, Leah, there has to be one woman in here you might like!" Mari begged.

Leah shook her head and examined her options. Weeding out the smooching couples, grinding girls, haughty plastics, hipster wannabes, and bad haircuts; she spotted a mass of brown curls flying around the corner next to the floorstanding speakers.

She elbowed Mari and pointed towards the corner. Leah fluffed her bangs and squeezed between the writhing bodies and bogarting conversationalists.

Leah didn't realize how loud and strong the bass was so close to the speakers and could hardly keep her focus on the brunette's gentle yet intense movements. Her feet appeared planted, but her body moved as though the sound waves went right through her. Leah eased next to her and tried to project over the thundering music.

“Can I dance with you?” she smiled.

The brunette's massive curls whipped back and forth like spinning ribbons. Leah's heart slowly began to drop to her stomach, and then the brunette turned her head towards Leah and returned the smile.

Leah found the beat and tried to follow the brunette's moves – and she had some pretty good ones. Her boots never left the floor, but her hands made it to Leah's waist and kept her in sync. Often she'd reach out towards the speakers as if to pull the bass right out and into her own body. Though her curls covered most of her head and neck, beneath the spiral shades were a pair of glistening Carolina blue eyes. In the immense darkness of the club, her eyes sparkled and shone like gemstones. Leah couldn't take her eyes off of her. In half an hour she realized they were both pouring with sweat.

“Hey, can I buy you a drink?” Leah asked.

The brunette brought her index finger to ear and shook her head. They were still very close to the booming speakers. Leah took her hand and guided her to the bar, which was fortunately the farthest from the speakers.

“Can I buy you a drink?” Leah repeated.

Again the brunette tapped her ear with her index finger. Confusion spread across Leah's face.

Was this a new hip way of rejecting someone? People these days....

“So that's a ‘no’?” Leah asked.

The brunette furrowed her brows and squinted as her eyes scanned the dance floor. She found her targets and waved them over. Was Leah's humiliation to become a main event?

Four women emerged from the crowd. A portly woman sporting a pixie cut, black dress shirt, and bright green suspenders squeezed to the front of the group. The brunette lifted her hands

and made soft and elegant movements, as though she was manipulating space and time. Leah was thoroughly confused.

“She can’t hear you, she’s deaf,” Green suspenders sighed as though she’d spoken this sentence for the umpteenth time to the umpteenth person.

All Leah could say was, “Oh. Well....would she still like a drink?”

Green suspenders made hurried movements with her hands and the brunette locked eyes with Leah and smiled. She pulled out her phone and tapped the buttons with her thumbs, eyeing Leah. Leah pulled out her phone and the brunette reached for it while giving hers to Leah. Leah wasn’t sure if she understood what the brunette was conveying, but took a chance anyway and added her name and number to her contact list.

The brunette held Leah’s phone outward, showed the newly added contact info, and pointed at herself. Leah did the same. Phones went back to their respective owners and Leah gave her another smile before walking away to find Mari to spill every detail.

“Her name is Stella,” Leah gushed, staring at the number on her phone. The next afternoon Leah drove to Mari’s to tell her about the previous evening. Every detail her mind could retrieve flowed from her mouth like a river. Mari speculated as to how they would communicate in person and Leah had yet to figure that out as well.

“Should I text her now? I think she meant for me to text her. I certainly can’t call, right? Of course not. What should I say? How will we communicate? Can she read my lips? Will we write on paper? Won’t she get bored with me?” Leah pondered, turning her phone over and over between her hands.

“I’m not sure what you were thinking, but this might not be a good idea,” Mari informed her.

“You didn’t see her.”

Barnes & Noble – ole reliable for literary needs. Rows and rows of American Sign Language books....Leah picked the one with the most pictures. Where better to start than with the alphabet – nowhere Leah could think of. Twenty minutes into her fingerspelling practice, she thought of Stella. Though full communication with Stella would be light-years away, she could

get a few messages through. Text messaging really does pay for itself.

*Hey, it's Leah from the club the other night. Hope you're having a great day. Maybe you would like to have some coffee with me?*

*Hi! Coffee yes. When? Where?*

*Is tomorrow at 3 okay? Do you know where the Barnes & Noble on Jackson and Cohen is? Think so. See you tomorrow!*

Is this a date? Did I just ask her for a date? Or is it just coffee? What the heck am I getting myself into? Not sure, but she looks damn good.....?

Leah twisted so in her seat that her khaki pants became bunched in her crotch. This was so unlike her. That Stella was ten minutes late wasn't helping, though it wouldn't be the first time Leah was stood up. Ten more minutes and that'll be it. "Chicken Soup for the Loveless" was just a few aisles from the coffee shop inside the bookstore.

Hope rose inside her like a soaring leaf in a windstorm as she saw Stella maneuvering through the throngs of prepubescent girls surrounding the Teen Paranormal Romance aisle, to reach the coffee shop. There was a light bead of sweat along her hairline; her abundance of curls pulled back into a ponytail resembled a restrained animal fighting to be unleashed. The snug tyrian purple tank top nicely complimented her light olive skin. Her blue jean shorts and black yoga sandals gave the appearance of ultimate comfort.

Leah smiled and it was returned. This was their main form of communication, yet what it said between them lacked a full and accurate translation.

"H-I," Leah fingerspelled.

Stella's expression turned to surprise. With her pointer and middle finger, she made a motion at her chin. Confusion spread across Leah's face and she reached into her sling bag and pulled out a notebook and pen.

*Cute,* Stella wrote.

Leah pulled the American Sign Language book out of her bag and showed it to Stella. Stella made a petting motion on her chin.

*Sweet,* Stella wrote.

*Thank you for coming,* Leah wrote.

*Thank you for asking,* Stella wrote.

*Where are you from?*

*Gibraltar*

Leah's jaw dropped and Stella became puzzled.

*That's incredible! Is it nice there?*

*Beautiful. Everyone loves football.* Leah explained. *Where are you from?*

*Born and raised right here. Not as interesting as Gibraltar, but I've still had some good times.*

Time seemed to melt. Not disappear, but slip and melt away into an unknown, ungraspable, foreign substance. Minutes and hours passed, but were completely disregarded as Leah and Stella found the words to come to know each other. Every now and then Leah would stop and fingerspell a word and Stella would show her how to sign it, how to hold her hand, the proper movements...Leah was a willing student.

When they weren't together, they began texting each other from sunup to sundown. Leah told Stella about her long days working at First National Bank of Woodcrest, and Stella of her many interesting clients at the hair salon where Stella was one of the most popular stylists. While communicating was often a slow and tedious process, as time went on it slowly became smoother and more efficient. The more they conversed, the more similarities were discovered. Both were fond of children, avid cyclists, horror film addicts, and passionate about Italian food. Soon enough, pen and paper were retired as Leah began to grasp the basic usage of Stella's language.

Though one day Leah's curiosity got the better of her...

"Do you ever speak?" she asked.

"No," Stella responded.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to or have to."

Communication with those in the other's life wasn't so smooth. Stella's friends signed at the speed of light, Leah struggled to follow what was going on. And with Leah's friends, patience was needed to get everyone's message across through Leah. Stella was worth the cramped hands, eye strains, and headaches. Her hands to Leah's eyes were the keys to an infinite

treasure. Stella showered Leah with love like she'd never known; if only every other woman in the world could know the same.

Late one night Leah woke from a dream. Her alarm clock said it was 2:30 in the morning and the repeated knocking she heard had to have been pipes or a wild party. However, the sound of pipes knocking doesn't turn into banging or screaming. Leah rolled out of bed and followed to noise to her front door.

“Leah!” Bang. “Leah!” Slam.

Leah opened the front door. Mari was there, her face a bright tomato red. Mari stormed into Leah's place, her hands balled into tight fists, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Four months you've been with this deaf chick and it's like I don't even exist anymore!” Mari screamed, her voice barely intelligible through the spit and tears.

“Sweetie, that's not true. My time is just a little more divided now. Let me call you in the morning,” Leah attempted to soothe her.

“Why do you love her? I know you! I love you! Why can't you love me back!?”

Mari grabbed Leah into a firm embrace and kissed her deeply. As Mari's lips touched Leah's, an enormous wave of confusion rolled through Leah's body.

“BITCH!” yelled an unfamiliar voice behind her.

Leah and Mari turned to see Stella standing in the bedroom doorway. Whirling curls framed her fury-filled face.

## Why Bloodroot is Vegan/Vegetarian

**Selma Miriam & Noel Furie**

Authors' Note: *A recent issue of Sinister Wisdom carried a short review of Lierre Keith's book, "The Vegetarian Myth." The review was a rave. We found it to be as abhorrent to us as was the time years ago, when a lesbian magazine sent us copies of lesbian S&M. We could not stomach carrying such in our bookstore and at the time we returned the copies, just as we returned the copies of Sinister Wisdom.*

*Sinister Wisdom responded with a gracious request for us to discuss our beliefs about vegetarianism relative to Keith's book. This is our answer.*

### **I. How we came to start a vegetarian restaurant 35 years ago, and why our menu is increasingly vegan.**

In 1977, several friends and I started Bloodroot. Why? Because my change from housewife and mother to lesbian feminist meant that I needed to lead a life outside patriarchal morality away from husband and societal expectations. I wanted a community with shared values (not all, but most), and I wanted to think and put into practice what was feminism for me. This has been my 35-year work in progress shared by Noel Furie, and others who have been with us at Bloodroot.

So my "coming out" was not about a sexual choice, though it included that; it was not about getting married to a woman instead of a man and going on to lead a couple's life similar to that of heterosexuals.

It meant trying to lead a life that was better. Better for people and creatures and the earth itself as well as for myself.<sup>1</sup> We hoped for community. And while of course there have been changes, mostly this choice, these choices have made that possible.

But how could we, Noel and I, keep doing this for 35 years? We can because it is so deeply satisfying to us. We like the people who come to be fed by us, very much. We still like

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer (*Eating Animals*) became a vegetarian when he became a father. It seemed critical to him that fatherhood required him leading a moral life.

cooking very much. We can't imagine a different life. Perhaps it is because it evolved slowly, and perhaps it is because we never chose deprivation. We never went "cold turkey" (except on meat, fish, and poultry!). Gradually our menu became more vegan, since we admire the animal rights activists who come to us and we want very much to please them. I want the food they eat here to be delicious and diverse. We love the idea of eating what is in our gardens or at the farmers' market this minute, totally glutting on strawberries in June and apples in September.

But we are also thrilled to explore traditional people's comfort foods, and so will search out imported Haitian or Jamaican or Mexican or Greek or Korean ingredients to make the dishes of which our workers and friends have shared recipes. The result is that we can look forward to each season's menus with many more options than those whose plates center on meat.

Our customers don't have to be vegetarians, and many are not. But where can they get homemade bread like ours, or soups as satisfying? We want to seduce them with delicious vegan food, and to encourage them to eat less or no meat.

## **II. The Vegetarian Myth**

We can't help but be disgusted when someone like Michael Pollan who writes so well about the harm caused by industrial agriculture, then writes of hunting and slaughtering a wild (female) pig and how it was the best meal of his life. (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*). We're disappointed when someone like Barbara Kingsolver convinces her 10 year old daughter to not name her "pet" chickens so that she won't mind them being killed to sell so that the daughter can then buy a pony (*Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*). As you can imagine, we had no interest in reading Lierre Keith's "Vegetarian Myth" – but since I was asked to write about why we didn't want to carry *Sinister Wisdom* copies with a plug for her book in our bookstore, it became necessary to read it, and what an unpleasant couple of days it was! Full of half-truths and outright lies, I would have had to spend too much of my precious

days picking it apart sentence by sentence. Luckily some folks have done a more than adequate job on the internet.<sup>2</sup>

But in general, Keith makes these claims: First, that the advent of agriculture has gradually destroyed the earth's ecosystems and creatures. Of course, Jim Mason's *An Unnatural Order*<sup>3</sup> (1993, Simon and Schuster) discussed just this, and further that the rise of agriculture and religion made dominion over women, children, animals, slaves acceptable and right. He contends that animal husbandry *in particular* created patriarchal rule with these forms of oppression. His book expresses the paradigm of what we, as feminists believe in. So of course he came to a very different conclusion from Keith's.

Keith repeatedly speaks of her own ignorance and arrogance when she was a vegan. Now that she is enlightened, the rest of us vegetarians and vegans must be ignorant and arrogant, since we have not learned from her pantheon of deniers of the benefits of vegetarianism. She seems to blame vegetarianism for the huge monocultures of grain and soy (raised to fatten animals), and makes little or no distinction between this "agriculture" and small farms growing broccoli and carrots.

### III. Political Ups and Downs

Secondly, Keith blames her bad health on her 20-year vegan diet. It would seem that every movement wanting to change things for the better contains individuals who at first are the truest believers and who become angry at any slippage. Then they suddenly become the backlash and despise all that they once believed. The impossibility of perfectionism can be very disappointing.

We don't know whether Keith was a junk food vegan or not. There are certainly lots of them, just as there are lots of junk food carnivores, and we know junk food can make us sick. We also know that there are lots of folks (most often women) who feel virtuous about deprivation: fasting – omitting fats from their diets

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<sup>2</sup> Lierre Keith's elaborate, self-congratulatory excuse for abandoning veganism:

<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2009/06/12/18601536.php>

<sup>3</sup> Re-released in 2005 by Lantern Books, NYC. Mason is also the author, with Peter Singer, of *Animal Factories*.

– omitting all carbohydrates. Whatever. It would seem that extreme mortification turns into extreme rejection. Well, we don't do that. We love food. We don't want any deprivation. We want our food to be sensuous and diverse and delicious. We just don't want it to be made from members of our family . . . and that goes all the way down (down?) to fish.

#### **IV. Antidote**

Anyway, as an antidote to Keith's book, I reread Jonathan Foer's *Eating Animals*. It was healing.

Then I spoke to Jim Mason. He talked about relative justice. We can't do everything we might wish to do to make the world a better place. Maybe it is a hybrid car instead of a Hummer. Maybe it is supporting a local farmer by joining a CSA. Maybe it's eating meat once a week instead of three times a day. Maybe it's not buying bottled water or not using plastic bags. *Something*. None of us can do it all, but for our own sakes and health, we should try to do something. As Jim says, “Justice is what equals least harm.” And we need to consider which gurus we listen to. If your need to eat meat is so great that you will take any justification, there are plenty of carnistic gurus out there.

I also talked to Lagusta Yearwood, who has been vegan for 18 years, and Stephanie Zinowski, vegan for at least that. Lagusta and Stephanie used to work here. Lagusta makes and sells fabulous vegan chocolates and Stephanie runs Wesleyan University's Vegan Cafe. Their vegan friends are healthier than their carnivore counterparts.<sup>4</sup> I am about to be 77 years old and I seem to be physically in better shape than meat-eating peers my age. Many customers come into our restaurant assuming we are a health place. I know our food is healthy, but we are not interested in the latest health fads. We are animal rights vegetarians and our intention and pleasure is to prepare and eat delicious diverse meals that change every season, and to share them with our friends.

We really are lucky!

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<sup>4</sup> As Colin Campbell's *China Study* documents thoroughly. The statistics in his book were collected in the 1980's and the diet and disease information therein not relevant to China today, but to a China where large groups of people ate very little or no meat.

## **Barbara Grier, 1933-2011** **“We had a wonderful time.”**

**Joanne Passet**

A mistress of hyperbole, Barbara Grier once told me that “if you can convey excitement with your voice, you can sell anyone anything.”<sup>1</sup> As the public face and voice of Naiad Press, she uttered enough cogent, “hilariously funny,” and sometimes explosive comments to ensure that her beloved company would receive ample free publicity. People might at times question her veracity and intentions, but never her commitment to the cause of lesbian literature. Best known for her work as editor and then publisher of *The Ladder*, and as co-founder and co-publisher of Naiad, the world’s largest lesbian press, she pushed and prodded authors, publishers, and bookstores in order to ensure that any lesbian, anywhere, could walk into a library or bookshop and find lesbian books.

Born November 4, 1933, the Midwestern native acquired her flamboyant promotional skills, pragmatism, and indefatigable work ethic during a childhood that included frequent moves in the Midwest and West, an open-minded mother with a theatrical bent, and a loving and strong female-centered household. Her parents Phillip and Dorothy Grier separated when their daughter was ten and divorced four years later. By that time Grier had already come out to her mother who, because of interactions with gays and lesbians in the theater, was neither shocked nor appalled. The precocious young girl consulted medical textbooks and then proceeded to the Detroit Public Library to request books on homosexuals at a time when few dared to speak the word aloud. Unable to afford a college education, Grier began work immediately following high school and helped her mother and younger sisters Diane and Penni financially. The autodidact’s desire for knowledge, however, knew no bounds and she soaked up information like a sponge for the remainder of her life.

In retrospect, it seems natural that the young bibliophile would fall in love with librarians. At eighteen, Grier met Helen

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara Grier, email to the author, October 11, 2007.

Bennett, sixteen years her senior. Together for the next two decades, the couple made their home in Kansas City, Kansas, except for a few years spent in Denver, where Helen attended library school. In 1967 Grier had a fateful encounter with Donna McBride at the Kansas City Public Library, and by 1972 the two had formed a loving partnership that spanned nearly forty years. They married on September 5, 2008, in Van Nuys in a double ceremony with friends during the brief period when California sanctioned same-sex marriage.

As someone who came of age during the homophobic McCarthy era, Grier was indelibly marked by the dearth of positive examples of lesbians in print and while still a teenager embarked on a lifelong quest to ferret out fictional examples of lesbian themes and characters. When Grier went to order a copy of Jeannette Howard Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956), she learned that the pioneering bibliographer also resided in Kansas City, Kansas. After an initial meeting, the two became warm friends and, under Foster's tutelage, Grier refined her technique for decoding lesbian characters and themes in literature. In 1992 the avid collector of lesbian literature and her partner donated a lifelong accumulation of an estimated 15,000 books plus archival material and memorabilia to the San Francisco Public Library's James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center. They also gave numerous issues of lesbian periodicals to the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles.

Grier's association with *The Ladder* began in the spring of 1956 when she and Foster discovered the first issue and immediately subscribed. A regular reviewer using such pen names as Gene Damon, Lennox Strang, and Vern Niven (primarily derived from her family tree), she went on to compile a "Lesbiana" column and to serve as poetry and fiction editor beginning in 1966. Assuming the role of editor two years later, she dropped the subtitle "A Lesbian Review" from the cover and attempted to transform *The Ladder* into a more mainstream feminist periodical. As editor, Grier worked tirelessly to expand *The Ladder* in size, circulation and distribution, and she took delight in knowing that there was at least one issue for which she wrote every item including letters to the editor on both sides of an issue. In the late 1960s Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) leaders

increasingly debated the organization's agenda and relationship to male gay rights groups and the women's movement.<sup>2</sup> Internal dissension led DOB president Rita LaPorte to develop a plan for liberating *The Ladder* from its parent organization, and with Grier's enthusiastic approval she took the DOB mailing list from the printer's office in the summer of 1970. Without its primary means of reaching membership, the DOB's national board dissolved, while *The Ladder* continued as a bimonthly publication under Grier's ambitious editorship until it ceased with the August/September 1972 issue. Subscribers like Anyda Marchant appreciated her efforts to publish such talented writers as Rita Mae Brown, Judy Grahan, Dolores Klaich, Lee Lynch, Isabel Miller, Jane Rule, and Valerie Taylor. "It is obvious to me," Marchant wrote in July 1972 upon learning that *The Ladder* was about to cease, "that a great deal of the quality of *The Ladder* has been due to your judgment and dedication."<sup>3</sup>

Grier is perhaps best known as the co-publisher and co-founder of Naiad Press, which began in 1974 when Marchant contacted Grier for assistance in publishing her novel, *The Latecomer*.<sup>4</sup> Deciding to self-publish her book under the imprint The Naiad Press, she asked if Grier and McBride would promote the book using *The Ladder's* mailing list of 3,850 names and then serve as distributor. With that, Naiad Press was born, and two years later it incorporated under the direction of Marchant, her partner Muriel Crawford, Grier, and McBride. From their rural Bates City, Missouri, home, and later from Tallahassee, Grier and McBride slowly and steadily developed their publishing company from a mail-order business into the world's largest lesbian press and, in the process, shaped public perceptions of lesbian literature and contributed to widespread availability and

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<sup>2</sup>For more on the history and politics of the Daughters of Bilitis, see Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters : a History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Anyda Marchant to Barbara Grier, July 6, 1972, Barbara Grier-Naiad Press Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Series I, Box 1.

<sup>4</sup>Marchant and Grier's correspondence in spring 1974 contradict published accounts that date Naiad's founding to January 1973. See Marchant to Grier, March 29, 1974, Grier-Naiad Press Collection, Series I, Box 1.

acceptance. Best known for the hundreds of light romances it published, Naiad Press also reprinted such classic lesbian authors as Ann Bannon, Jane Rule, Renee Vivien, and Gale Wilhelm and also introduced new voices like Katherine Forrest, Karin Kallmaker, Lee Lynch, Claire McNab, Jaye Maiman, Diane Salvatore, and Lauren Wright Douglass. Naiad published fewer non-fiction works, with some of the more notable titles including a reprint edition of J. R. Roberts' *Black Lesbians: An Annotated Bibliography* (1981), Anita Cornwall's *Black Lesbian in White America* (1983), Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan's bestselling *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* (1985), Jeannette Howard Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1985), Claire Potter's *The Lesbian Periodicals Index* (1986), and three editions of Grier's bibliography *Lesbian in Literature* (1967, 1975, 1981).

The techniques and skills that Grier acquired while working for banks, retail stores, and collection agencies prepared her to become the consummate promoter of lesbian literature and, at times, the publisher that people loved to hate. She knew how to get things done, was willing to do the work it took, and set out to organize people around her agenda. Recognizing the necessity of cultivating and sustaining relationships with authors, customers, and her peers in the publishing business, Grier wrote countless letters each week, many of them filled with witty, and at times flirtatious, repartee. She also spent countless hours on the phone each day, and knew most of her booksellers by the sound of their voices. Persistent in her promotion of Naiad titles, and driven to increase lesbian visibility, Grier's intensity sometimes led her to cross the line from promotion to harassment. As someone who came of age before second wave feminism swept the nation, she remained "a bit wary of the collective [way of] functioning," and was at times at odds with the priorities and methods of her younger counterparts in lesbian and feminist publishing.<sup>5</sup> Pragmatic rather than politic, she in 1985 sold serial rights to several of the essays from *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence to Forum*, an adult magazine published by Bob Guccione's Penthouse, Ltd. Contributors to the anthology had envisioned

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<sup>5</sup>Grier to Women of *Conditions*, May 19, 1977, Grier-Naiad Press Collection, Series I, Box 1.

their stories being read by a small circle of lesbian feminists, not by prurient males, and the fury over this decision prompted widespread censure and a threatened boycott of Naiad Press. Surfing over waves of controversy, she remained steadfastly and intensely focused on her end goal, which was the integration of lesbian literature into the mainstream, and by the following year the controversy had subsided although embers of rage smoldered for years. During the next fifteen years Naiad continued to grow and flourish. After years of working 80-hour weeks, Grier and McBride scaled back their operation in late 2000 by giving Kelly Smith of the newly founded Bella Books the rights to most of Naiad's existing books and contracts. They retired from the publishing business completely in 2003.<sup>6</sup>

Barbara Grier pursued and published lesbian literature with a passion, but she also believed in the importance of play. As the many guests who visited their homes, "Simple Pleasures" and "Simple Addition," in Florida can attest, she practiced what she preached and enjoyed the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. Her letters and interview transcripts, which are peppered with the words "wonderful" and "fun," portray a highly positive, if complex, woman. Our images of Barbara Grier depend on when we knew her and under what circumstances—was it as editor of *The Ladder*, co-founder of Naiad Press, or a formidable presence at meetings of the Women in Print movement and National Women's Studies Association? Was it as an enthusiastic participant of the gay and lesbian publishers' aisle at the American Booksellers Association annual convention? Was it as a mentor who encouraged us to write or to embark upon new ventures, or as the voice on the other end of an early morning phone call? Was it as the dedicated fan of Tennessee women's basketball who traveled to Knoxville in a car bedecked with magnetic Lady Vols emblems, or was it as the lover of cats (who sometimes preferred them to people)? Was it as the "good sport" who Donna McBride fondly recalls was "willing to go along with anything I wanted to do."<sup>7</sup> As those who knew Barbara Grier would agree, she was outspoken, blunt, direct, and honest, a

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<sup>6</sup> Etelka Lehoczky, "Turning the Page," *The Advocate*, October 24, 2000, pp. 101-2.

<sup>7</sup> Donna McBride, email to the author, January 17, 2012.

woman on a mission. She rejected the lesbian invisibility and negativity of her youth and set out to displace it with positive images because she wanted to change “the ways in which young women grow up and see themselves.”<sup>8</sup> Along the way, she had a wonderful time.



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<sup>8</sup>Grier to Dear Friends, July 24, 1983, Grier-Naiad Press Collection.

## Reviews

### **We'Moon 2012 , Gaia Rhythms for Women, Chrysalis**

(Mother Tongue Ink and We'Moon Company, 2011), paperback, 200 pages, \$18.95.

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

I've been brooding over the idea of chrysalis. When you see an orange and black caterpillar creeping along the sidewalk you know it has no idea that it will wrap itself with strands of its own making and hang it self from a branch. I am no longer in the twentieth century and not yet in the twenty- first emotionally, a long way from being a butterfly. As the writers of *We'Moon* tell me, the process won't be easy. On the other hand, it is inevitable. We who are apart of the earth are experiencing off the scale earthquakes, floods, fires, famines.

Where is our chrysalis? To make it more interesting, this is the year of the dragon, a powerful symbol for the Chinese and for all of us. "Dragon's influence inspires, passion, drive and daring." We are in for a ride.

Astro-view tells us to "stay alert, awake, aware, and involved as a new era grows in its chrysalis, breaks open and begins to take flight." We are beginning a new cycle, moving into the age of Aquarius. The time astro-view was written, back in 2011, we saw destruction of the status quo and people marching in the streets all over the United States and all over the world. We have no idea what will result from the Egyptian Spring.

Each year *We'Moon* dedicates a portion of their proceeds of their sales to a woman's organization and this year it is *Circle of Health* (COHI). They work with grass roots groups and professionals who take care of women in times of disaster and crisis, working with new born, maternal and reproductive rights. Every day a woman dies of related pregnancy complications. COHI works in many countries: Tibet, Sri Lanka, Louisiana, Tanzania, Israel, Palestine, Haiti and Sudan. I wondered about Louisiana and then I remembered hurricane Katrina. If you want to get in contact with Circle of Health their URL is [www.cohintl.org](http://www.cohintl.org).

In *We’Moon*, Musawa is exploring “retirement.” Not complete “retirement,” she tells us she would hope that with the deterioration inside and outside, known as the aging process, our younger women, who have benefited by our work, will revere that work and those of us who have pioneered this evolution. That’s not how she puts it but reading between the lines that’s what I see.

My “retirement” came in 2002 when I earned my second MA, this time in Theatre Arts in playwriting. Because of a minor car accident (no one was hurt, lost my license to the state of California), I decided at eighty to give up driving. At eighty, they are just waiting to take your license away. While I did not retire completely, I still write reviews for the *L-Word* and am part of a poetry group, I don’t live as I used to. I’m in my chrysalis where I’m still hanging from a branch, waiting.

*We’Moon* also has horoscopes. Who could resist a glimpse of looking into one’s future? That’s probably what most every one does before reading all of the valuable other pages. And there is the ephemeris, a building block for those astrologers who are among us. Musawa says “I am looking forward to the prospect of more freedom from external circumstances, as in a Chrysalis: a protective creative state of being, resourced from within, that allows deep-rooted transformation to take place.”

To get you through this next year *We’Moon* has a calendar with excerpts from the date book. There also are greeting cards, *We’Moon’s Celebration of Thirty-years of We’Moon Art and Writing*, the *Last Wild Witch* written by Starhawk and a *Matriotism* poster. You can see all this and the call for contributors for 2013 at [www.wemoon.ws](http://www.wemoon.ws).

*We’Moon* is also mobile! It is available for the iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch and Android Phones.

**Shaken and Stirred** by Joan Opry (Bywater Books, Ann Arbor, MI, 2011) paperback, 301 pages, \$14.95

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

The publishers at Bywater Books say, “Bywater Books represents the coming of age of lesbian fiction. We are committed

to bringing the best of contemporary lesbian writing to a discerning readership.” This recent novel by Jean Opry lives up to that promise.

We meet Poppy Koslowski, a writer of instruction manuals for children’s games living in Seattle, who, after struggling with the decision, decides to have a necessary hysterectomy. Her recovery time is interrupted by the news that her alcoholic, often abusive, but sometimes endearing grandfather Hunter, is actively dying in a hospital ICU. So, Poppy, accompanied by best friend Abby, travels back home to Raleigh, North Carolina, where we meet parents, friends, and other related characters from Poppy’s past. The author delivers vivid location details and uses the return home as an opportunity for our heroine to reminisce to bitter-sweet memories about her childhood and adolescence.

Poppy flashes back to being a tomboy trying to put a motorcycle together with her pal Jack. She recalls moving to Raleigh when her parents separated and enduring the pressure from her maternal grandmother to be a lady. She conceded to wear a dress, but only on one special occasion. Issues of racism and classism come up as she recounts her experiences with her family. She also tells us the origin of her name: a self-inflicted accident had given her a permanent enlarged iris in her left eye, so her grandfather Hunter called her “pop-eye” after the comic strip character. Her friends called her Poppy. And we also learn that Poppy and Abby had been friends in high school when the geeky and lanky Poppy first began her love affairs with other girls.

One girl in particular stands out in her memory. The girl next door, Susan, had a mother who was also a drunk though she did her drinking off the premises. Susan and her father sometimes had to pick her up in sleazy hotels. It seems natural that Susan and Poppy would bond. Susan was two years older than Poppy and was dating young men, which made Poppy jealous until she learned they were gay. She also learned that Susan was a lesbian when Susan seduced her. Although Poppy was ecstatic, she soon wanted to be the seducer, being a natural born butch.

Poppy went away to college to earn a graduate degree in English and Susan became a doctor, working with Doctors without Borders in Yugoslavia. While Poppy is visiting her

grandfather, Susan is home as well. They clear the air about the reason their relationship failed.

This novel depicts family dynamics, grief, alcoholism, friendship, and love lost with honesty and humor. Well worth the read.

**Keeping Up Appearances** by Ann Roberts, 2010 Spinsters, Inc. 214 pages, \$14.95

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

Ann Roberts' ninth novel follows A.J, an autistic teenager, through one year of his experience as a student in an Arizona middle school special education program. A.J has difficulty controlling his emotions. For example, when he is agitated, he has been known to take off his clothes and run screaming through the halls. And now that he is coming into adolescence and acting out his interest in girls, he has become even more disruptive and the school, fearing a lawsuit from parents, urges A.J's mother, Constance Richardson, a high-powered attorney, to move him to a special school for autistic children. She refuses, and in fact insists that he be mainstreamed into non-special education classes. She resorts to blackmailing the principal to get her way.

The district's new special education director, the beautiful Andi Loomis, convinces the school's butch lesbian principal, Faye Burton, to keep their affair secret, even though Faye is already out to all her teachers and administrators. This sort of secrecy makes them vulnerable to Constance's blackmail scheme. Constance hires a detective to shadow them but, except for a few photos of them looking fondly at each other at the mall, she doesn't have much ammunition, although she keeps these photos in reserve. Faced with the homophobic climate of the education system and an administration that does not support lesbian couples, in an act of self-preservation, Andi betrays Faye. The reader is left to contemplate the impact of homophobia, which leads some people to remain closeted and others to suffer injustices at the personal and professional levels.

True love never runs smooth especially when one of you is in the closet. The lovers are discrete though this is hard on the out lesbian who finds the closet to be suffocating. I remember when I was in Philadelphia working at the Women's Center. I was out to my coworkers although not to the company for whom I was working. And my lover was in the closet at her commune. That made things difficult for both of us, so I can empathize with the principal. Some might say my lover was right to keep her sexuality a secret, as it turned out, because we were evicted when our lesbian feminist life was revealed.

The author of this novel also explores how homophobia affects adolescents as well. Middle school is one of the most difficult times for teenagers, and it is no coincidence that Roberts, who has worked as a teacher and an administrator for grades K – 12, chose to set her novel in a middle school in contemporary America. She says the quickest way to start a fight in middle school is to call a boy a “fag” or a “queer.” According to Roberts despite all the progress made in public schools “Homophobia is truly the last form of accepted prejudice in public education.” In this novel, she shows us bullying and harassment between students when “jocks” attack a boy and throw him in a dumpster. In this way, the novel tackles a very current issue.

The novel is timely and relevant; Roberts shows us layers of the disease of homophobia in middle school students, gang members, school administrators, parents, and teachers and how homophobia permeates our society.

**The Girls Club** by Sally Bellorose, Bywater Books, 2011, paperback, 287 pages, \$14.95

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

When I first heard of *The Girls Club* I thought it was about pre-pubescent girls who had a clubhouse, maybe in a tree. I was surprised to learn that the novel gives us a look into the life of a young woman with ulcerative colitis who is facing life's challenges in the 1960s and 1970s when things were beginning to open up for feminists and lesbians.

Cora Rose is 14 at the beginning of the novel. Her disability confines her to bathrooms most of the time, and for this reason the girls in her 9th grade class are not kind, finding her gross. But Cora finds a love interest: her friend Stella. They begin to experiment and fall in love, but Stella's family moving out of the neighborhood breaks up this friend/lovership.

Spanning eight years, the novel shows us formative moments in Cora's life such as this one that shape and alter her perception of herself.

Cora is very different from her two older sisters, with whom she has a complicated relationship. Marie is the rule-breaker: she gets pregnant, refuses to have an abortion or to get married, and becomes a single parent. Her choices shock her working-class, Catholic family. In contrast, Renee, the responsible one, succeeds in nursing school and becomes an RN, much to her father's delight. It may be surprising that Renee offers Cora so much support later in the novel.

Cora Rose takes a different path from her sisters'. She also graduates from high school, but on prom night, drunk and eager to lose her virginity, she gets pregnant, even though Joe uses a condom. 99% is not 100%. Caving to pressure from her grandmother, Cora marries Joe in church and together they set out to raise their son, Sammy. Cora Rose gets restless. She never wanted to marry Joe, and she feels trapped in her marriage. She begins to remember Stella and her attraction to women and she longs for a way to escape. Eventually, she tells Joe she wants a divorce and seeks out the company of women at a local lesbian bar called The Girls Club. The topic of lesbianism keeps popping up around Cora Rose; on TV shows, casual conversations, and her neighbors are lesbian too. Cora Rose explores her attraction to women, having affairs, and coming to a new awareness of her sexuality and her gender.

At the same time, she is managing her son Sammy's asthma and her own health concerns. The doctors finally decide to operate on Cora Rose, but this means she will have to wear an ostomy bag since the surgeon has to cut out most of the diseased intestinal tract. Finally she will be free to live a normal life except for the bag. On scholarship, she attends nursing school, and her relationship with her sisters develops.

The book is divided into 4 sections: the first is Cora Rose's adolescence; the second is Cora Rose's wedding and the first four years raising Sammy; the third is her ostomy operation; and the fourth is coming to accept her gayness and discovering she is a butch.

The story is very well written. It is a warm recounting of the three sisters – how they support each other and how they fight. Renee and Maria have their own lives apart from Cora Rose but the book revolves around our heroine. And we get to see her relationship with herself, her body, her sexuality and her gender evolve over time. The book was met with positive reviews for obvious reasons.

## Contributors

**Liz Bradbury** has written over 350 nonfiction published articles, columns, and essays. She founded the Valley Gay Press newspaper in 1998 and has published and edited the paper for 14 years. She and her spouse Patricia Sullivan own Boudica Publishing Inc. which has published books under the imprints Lesbian Mystery Books, Wildfire Poetry Press, and Purple Kites Children's Books, since 2004. Bradbury is the author of the critically acclaimed Maggie Gale Mystery Series. Bradbury also founded Pennsylvania Diversity Network with Patricia Sullivan in 2004, it is now the largest GLBT advocacy organization by membership, in Pennsylvania. As Executive Director of Pennsylvania Diversity Network Bradbury works on advocacy and civil rights issues directly effecting the Queer community through a series of programs, legislative efforts, and on a case by case basis. Bradbury also created and works continuously on the national award winning, ever growing, PA Diversity Network Photo Project—Hundreds of Same-sex Couples: Facing Inequality, which currently features photos of over 700 rural and small city Pennsylvania same-sex couples - and is labeled with their names, professions, years together, and number of children (if any). The Photo Project has been shown in dozens of venues including the Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg, next to the entrance of the State Senate. Bradbury has been a Lesbian activist since the 1970s when she organized events in her graduate school's Gay/Straight Alliance.

**Happy/L.A. Hyder** is a self-taught American-Lebanese photographer, assemblage and installation artist whose photos of architectural details are intended to engage the viewer to see with a different eye. As founder and Director of LVA: Lesbians in the Visual Arts, she travels frequently; opportunities to photograph the details of various cities. She has exhibited her work in solo and group shows, locally and nationally. Her photos have appeared in numerous newsletters, catalogs and books including *The Color Purple*, author photo, *Visionary Voices: Women on Power* and *Anything You Love Can Be Saved* essays and letters of Alice Walker.

**Sarah J.** is 26, lesbian, and lives in Cairo, Egypt, where it is illegal to be gay.

**Sarah Kersh** studied poetry at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and before that, in Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Currently, she lives, writes, and throws pottery in Madison, Wisconsin.

**A'Ja Lyons** is an African-American, Lesbian native Houstonian with deep East Texas roots. She has had a book review column in the Valley Gay Press newspaper since 2008. She is currently at work on a series of short stories that deal with the personal experiences of all kinds of people, that explore a variety of issues, particularly, race, religion, sexuality, and the deaf community. She will marry her fiancée of four years in Niagara Falls this coming winter.

**Hannah Mesouani** is a Moroccan national who currently lives and works as a film projectionist in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She graduated from the Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, NJ and went on to be a Film Studies and Media & Communications major at Muhlenberg College. As a practicing Muslim and out member of the LGBTQ community, Mesouani serves on the board of the Pennsylvania Diversity Network and continues to write and make films about the issues that move her most.

**Selma Miriam** and **Noel Furie** have been owners of Bloodroot Vegetarian Restaurant and Feminist Bookstore since 1977, and have carried *Sinister Wisdom* since its inception. In 2010 Yale University requested and has acquired the personal, political, and business papers of Bloodroot. All are archived in the Sterling Library and are available to scholars. A more condensed history is in the cookbook set: *The Best of Bloodroot, Volumes I and II*, which also contain vegetarian and vegan recipes, respectively; both are arranged by the seasons.

**Ruth Mountaingrove** has published two chapbooks: *Rhythms of Spring* at twenty-two and *For Those Who Cannot Sleep* at fifty-four, the latter being influenced by Carl Jung and Gurdjieff before discovering the Women's Movement. Co-editor with Jean Mountaingrove of *WomanSpirit* and *The Blatant Image*. Reach her at [mountaingrove@suddenlink.net](mailto:mountaingrove@suddenlink.net)

**Joanne Passet**, Ph.D., is a Professor of History at Indiana University East, in Richmond, Indiana. The path to this position included public school teaching, working as a librarian and archivist, teaching in several schools of library and information science, and directing a college library. Her publications include *Cultural Crusaders: Women Librarians in the American West, 1900-17*, *Aspirations and Mentoring in an Academic Environment* (co-authored with Mary Niles Maack), *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*, *Sex Variant Woman: The Life of Jeanette Howard Foster*, and a number of articles on the power of print to create communities and transform lives. She first met Barbara Grier while doing research for the Foster biography.

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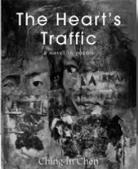
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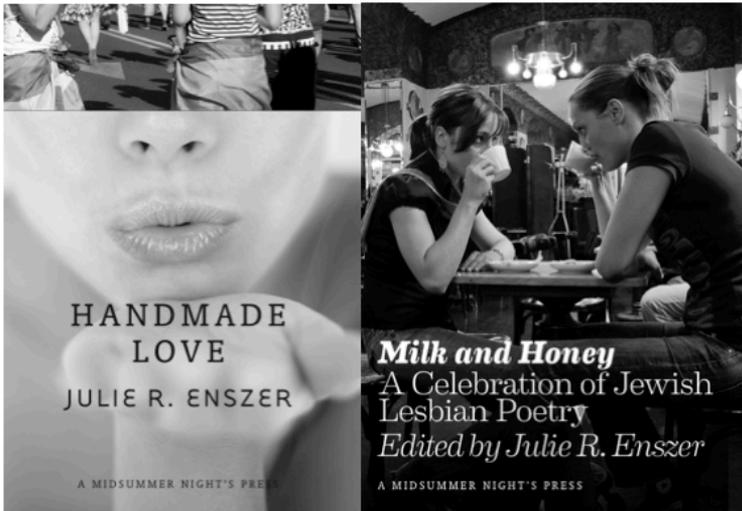
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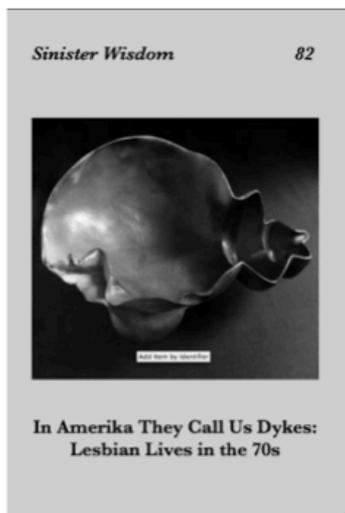
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