TOKEN

queer and free
TOKEN #2 spring '96

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LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MEN TO SUBMIT TO THE FALL 1996 ISSUE OF TOKEN. ANY INQUIRIES, QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ETC.: TOKEN@COLUMBIA.EDU

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I am not a nice Jewish girl,
Far cry, queer, bitch, pierced hard. I am
The Jewish girl who writes slutty
Verse at the bar on Friday night.

I am the fifth grader with mom’s
Black mascara smudged under my
Eyes, picking my nose. I aspire
To be a football star someday.

I am the chick who sits in my
Underwear, drumming on the floor,
Black lace panties, bada bing bang,
Big breasts, catching smoke between them.

I am commited, loony-bin-
Style. I swing on a thick rope
Which resembles my roots, reading
The bible, and erotic smut.

I am a small woman trying to find a steady beat.
I sit in synagogue for the Jewish New Year,
Shuffle, stand, bend. I hide my lover in an old
Man’s tallis bag. Meditate on the silver
Ring, naked lady curled around my thumb,
20th birthday present from my love.
Don’t say her name in this temple,
God’s watching and so is your
Mother. God’s watching, and
So is your mother.

I keep quiet because

She is the goddamn
Holiest prayer
On my closed
Jewish
Lips.
Rachel got out of bed in the dark to wash her face. She is very particular about feeling clean. It is her apartment, her bed, her bathroom. She keeps that stocked with the prettiest toiletries. She washes her face with Lancome Cleansing Gel that smells like Lily pads and then apricot purifying toner. Cleanse then tone. It left her skin like salt water pebbles. Those are next to the bottles of Avocado Body Scrub and Clinique Extra Gentle Eye-Make Up Remover. The bathroom is her haven; newly tiled floor and a mildew free shower curtain.

We had been out together that night. One day we were sitting outside downtown eating pretzels and cheese puffs out of a plastic Key Food bag and these two men came up to us and one offered us a bite of his sandwich. Steak with melted Swiss on focaccia. I don't eat meat but she took a bite and introduced us with Swiss falling from her lip. The other man was from Wales and I laughed when I heard his accent. Come to our bar they said. Friday night after twelve. So we have been going every week for the drinks, she says. I told the sandwich man to take down the lights that spelled LOUICE hanging from the barfront, and he did. He make me breakfast of undercooked eggs and fruit. Keep up your strength because you won't eat meat he told me.

I hate his eggs and never say honey.

A couple of weeks ago I think I saw her, the ex. She must be back never picking up her phone. We were at Welsh Man's and Sandwich Man's bar and Rachel pointed her out. She looked like cocaine. I watched her drink, the squared red nails tipping the glass to her mouth, the foggy thumbprint left on the glass, the empty glass with nothing but a lime peel. She put her arms around Rachel's neck, and with a swoop kissed her cheek. She was tiny and wore a powder blue tank dress exposing her lank, bony arms. They made me think of ostrich claws.

She did not know me and did not care about introductions. Rachel was polite as she opened up her pack of Virginia Slims from the inside of her palm and I was quiet. Rachel is always polite. She laughs a lot and always touches the person she is talking to gently on the arm at all the right moments.

It is late I said, you can wash your face in the morning. But it was morning, and Rachel washed even though I

**Pictures are just images I tell her, I would never commit**

named a drink for me; pineapple juice and vermouth with lime. Carolina with three extra letters for emphasis. I was drinking them tonight to keep from falling into boredom after a long day of doing nothing. Rachel met me at one-thirty, seething and out of breath like she had a fever, her calves aching from her performance.

Sometimes she dances around the apartment when she means to be walking, like when she boils spinach from the freezer and pulls lint from the drier. It makes me dizzy but I love it. She'll wear a cowgirl hat she bought at the airport in Mexico and I'll chase her around the kitchen with a spatula until she gives thanks to God for making us poor enough to live this way. I tried living with my man for a while but that did not work. He'd be drunk every night and force me under, against an icy mattress and wake me up in the mornings with hot breath and pulsating vocal chords, searching for but never finding rhythm. He would call his ex's machine. She was away, something to do with her cocaine habit, but he liked to call to hear her voice say leave me a message honey, and I'll do all the rest. He would call three or four times and never speak then wanted sleep. I heard splashing from the bathroom and coiled myself in her sheets waiting and picking off paint from the wall behind the headboard of the bed. I love Rachel's place; all the rooms are cramped because she can never resist furniture from the four o'clock in the morning street sellers. She's made friends with the heroin addict who wears glitter nail polish and sells plastic flowers and car parts even. She sold Rachel the ironing board Rachel uses in the bathroom. And when she irons, Rachel is careful, and never spills soil from the spider plants, the ones that constantly spawn young like fuck-bunnies, planted in hanging baskets. Her bed makes it feel like Easter even in January when there is nothing ahead but shivering and wet feet. Call it our place, she always tells me, but I feel safer thinking I am living inside her as if she were one of two halves of a cantaloupe.

I am still looking for a job. I could work in a store or for the Board of Education where my father keeps trying to get me, so I can be like him and bring home boxes of notebooks and pencils stamped with the letters BOARD OF ED. I have little patience for people, so right now I'm just living with Rachel. Sometimes I go
to her studio, and snap pictures of her and the rest of the dancers. I shot the pictures for this month's production flyers, but I don't think I'm a very promising talent. Besides, pictures are just images I tell her, I would never commit to them. I'm just waiting and looking for a cause.

This weekend Rachel's parents are coming for a visit so I have been housecleaning. Rachel has been coming home and re-vacuuming because she says it is a peaceful exercise. I don't mind, I watch TV with the volume turned up and make graham cracker sandwiches with chocolate pudding for her when she's finished. Then we lay on the sofa and talk about how wonderful it will be when we go to California. She begs me to massage her feet and I do it, as we watch the colored wax spill from glass candlesticks and then my man calls and yells through the phone for me to come over.

I put on the high heeled shoes that pinch my feet. I'll take a cab I tell Rachel and see you in the morning. Goodnight.

It was cold and the streets smelled frigid and my feet were hurting but I walked in the opposite direction of his house getting nipped by a Wednesday. I saw two whores with children's eyes, and looked closer to see that they were girls. Girls aching to be drunk and happy. What are you doing I asked them and one folded her arms across her chest smoothing over a lace covered nipple. She dipped her toe into a sewer in the street. The other rolled her skirt across her thigh. You are asking for rape I told them, and it's too cold.

Go away.

But I invited them to drink coffee with me and they came. We ordered and I showed them pictures I shot of Rachel and the dancers which I carry around with me, along with a picture of my parents' house in Brooklyn, and one of my man. That's me I said and blew rings of smoke until they slowly went "pop."

I told them my name was Carol, that I hated laundry.

He took our money for California.

I did not know Rachel had been saving. I thought California was pretend like the ballet, like how I said I was looking for a job.

I'm so stupid she kept crying and I was trembling. Rachel was not tearing and would not say anything else so I just rocked with her until she fell asleep, drained and assuaged by my anesthesia.

I have been sleeping with Rachel ever since Ryan Hickey. Rachel who keeps her bottle of talcum ordered, her feet pressed to her chest like dried stems in a book.

I wait for her as she cleans next door in the bathroom and I am patient. She is a grown woman who sometimes cries like a girl and tonight I will keep her, both of us lifted after a night of social mingling; us versus the world, that is how these things always turn out. We stay up even though we are tired and drink when our throats are closed. I am staying at Rachel's right now.
I watch her:
the girl who tidies with passion
puts everything in its place
takes her coffee black
boils her jackknife clean
down to the metal
and sinks it in her thighs clean
down to the bone
drawing horizontal stripes she is
painting herself like a race car.
to see how fast and fancy
she can
go go.
go.

I watch her:
the woman who measures with passion
telephones her daughter each tuesday at five
chews twelve ounces of greens
three times a day
and in the evening washes, dries, irons
takes in the seams
on the old dress she finally found crumpled in the attic
she calls it her rage
already decorated like the
victor
she comes to town and beats
it red.

I watch her:
the witch who disciplines with passion
conceals leather in her sock drawer
snorts lines off her arm in the girls’ room
spinning louder and louder, she vows
to suck it all
sadizing the world
she comes up its arm
and burns her sheets
every morning.
she is
begging to be called
a whore.
SILENCE BELONGS IN THE PAST

VOICE YOUR FUTURE
First, when approaching somebody for a relationship or a recreational relationship, please act cool, confident, and honest. People can always smell the fear and weakness in you. So, don't do that.

Assume a comfortable dialogue. Make yourself vulnerable bit by bit. If you didn't think you would have to make yourself vulnerable, even at this early stage of the process, then you were wrong. It was a lot of wishful thinking.

Observe the level of reciprocation of vulnerability. If it is strong, you have a live one. For example, if someone calls you up and talks to you and tells you that s/he feels comfortable talking to you: this is good. It would be good thing. If reciprocation is weak or just not there, go out whoring that night. It will make you feel better to sex people up and fuck with their minds.

Approach the situation calmly and slowly until you start to yearn for the first kiss. The first kiss is important. It plays a pivotal role. It can be the dawn of a relationship or send you into a night of whoring. When the first kiss is near, try to orchestrate it. You won't want to, but you'll have to. You'll want the fairy tale version, but it doesn't work. This you would know if you had common sense.

A good first kiss yields the possibility of a relationship. A bad first kiss requires that you go out whoring that night. Only treating other people like sex objects will make you feel better and make you forget about the horrendous kisses your lips have suffered through.

After the first kiss, a neo-relationship has started, and it will probably blossom. Unless you want to stop it, it probably will grow. If all your relationships fall through at the beginning, your shit is fucked up.

Proceed with the relationship and the physical relationship therein proportionately. DO NOT have sex on the first date if you want a serious relationship. (If you want just a recreational relationship, though, sex on the first day is a mark of your skills. You deserve MAD ASS props.) Begin with the kissing, then the heavy kissing, then work your ways to erogenous areas and so forth (you get my drift, I hope). But only do so when you feel ready, which will definitely mean that the emotional relationship is going well. Do not feel pressured. If somebody is pressuring you, s/he is an asshole. Go whoring that night, if this is true.

Take your own individual takes on your relationship and follow your instincts, they're probably right. Don't try to rationalize things which seem fishy to you. Rationalizing away someone's fucked-upness is bad and is in itself fucked-up. If you have a history of doing this, you might have to consider the possibility that you are fucked-up as well.

This is how to be in a relationship (or in everyday life):

Work on a gradient from aggressive to assertive (preferably assertive). DO NOT BE PASSIVE: your shit will get fucked up.

Always remember that the other person has feelings too. You yourself don't make up the rules. A relationship is joint control. You have to whip each other into shape equally or it'll suck.

If s/he pisses you off: tell him or her.
Honesty is the best policy. Don't let anyone walk all over you. It's not fun.

Don't be afraid to get mad at people. Acknowledge your feelings. Feel like you're kicking ass. Definitely kick ass. Kicking ass is good.

Be intense, passionate. Don't be fake. If you do, you'll suck. (Remember that when you're having oral sex the person who has to swallow is you and not the one you're pretending to be: it can be bitter to swallow.)

Don't take no kind of shit. If you think someone is moving in on your territory: evaluate, assimilate, annihilate.

Don't take things too seriously or your ass will get fucked up. Confront people: try to keep your cool. You know that you are the shit, so act like it. Demand respect, most of all. Not everybody has to like you, but EVERYBODY HAS TO RESPECT YOUR ASS. IF THEY DON'T, KICK THEIRS.

Be sexual, seductive, as much as you feel comfortable being, it will make for more exciting episodes.

**Rejection**

If someone rejects YOU (which would be fucked up because you're the one who should be rejecting him or her, because you are the end all and be all of the entire universe), take it and accept it, but don't dare show them emotion. This will make them feel better. Make them feel pain too. Act like the true shit you are. Use body language and facial expressions which would communicate: "You could have had this," or "You had this, but now you don't," or "You suck," or "You're fucked up in the head. I know because I went out with you." Use mad dirty looks. You'll look like an asshole, but it'll make you feel better, and at that moment you should only care about yourself. Take your frustration out on your friends, they can take it. (Don't like beat them, though, because they won't like injuries which will bruise, scar, or bleed.) Go out whoring that night, it will make you feel better to feel like a sex object and to treat others like sex objects: GET LUCKY!

Always know that you are the mac. YOU RULE THE WORLD. EVERYONE ELSE HAS TO BOW DOWN TO YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU ARE THE SHIT, AND WHEN YOU DIE THE WORLD WILL SUCK BECAUSE YOU WERE THE ONLY GOOD THING ON IT.

P.S. If you can, hook me up with a date, I want to try out my own advice.

If you feel unable to do any of this (well, just the kicking ass part, because the other stuff is really important to be done just by you) call me up. I'm always in the mood to whup somebody's ass. Especially that of a stupid motherfucker who sucks and is a dumb fuck.

ALWAYS SMILE AT THE WORLD. SMILE MORE WHEN PEOPLE DO STUPID STUFF BECAUSE YOU'LL COME OUT LOOKING LIKE THE WINNER (AND YOU ARE).

THE AB FAB TOKEN TWOSOME
I want him in among
Jars of grandma’s jelly
That are covered with
Moss-like pillows of mold
And pasty pink beads
Of sugar water stuck
To the half-empty sides

I want him in among
Jars of beetles
That are brittle, shaken
The wings and legs worn down
To a sandy powder
Years after I had
Plucked them from roses
And watched them die
In their own breath’s moisture
Unvented and overcrowded
In peanut butter scents

I want him in among
Jars of pupas
That are unhatched and crushed
Amid hollow seasons
And pungent leaves
Still dangling by threads
From old oak branches

I want him in among them
Shoved behind jars
Screwed on
And pushed away on a shelf
Where he is gone from sight
Where he is bottled
Where dust can cover
His fake grins, fake frowns and fake words
In a season of cold air blowing a wind tunnel off the river it is only natural, I suppose, that I should “catch” a cold. That I should get cold feet, or be given a cold shoulder. That I should walk by people who stare at me coldly. Snow falls silent, blanketing words that might make for warmer nights.

As it is, the cracks in my floor-to-ceiling windows are an easy entryway for the quiet cold, creeping up all over my body, somehow navigating the space between the balcony and the bedframe. I have managed to misplace the best of my blankets; it crawled down the hall into Kate’s room one night last week, and now has a new home in her smoke-filled, fluorescent den of books and papers. I don’t have the heart (or the mind) to entreat it to return. It would likely feel out of place.

I feel the cold mostly in my extremities. Hands, feet, nose, lungs. I’ve found a way to cover the two most obvious - sturdy boots that have gotten the best of both sun and slush, gloves lined with back-woods flannel. As of yet there is no way to cover my nose and to breathe at the same time, and the cold air is a rubber band around my chest. Drawing tighter, I nearly double over as I walk ahead.

It is a season of invisibility. More clothes to hide within, more work to mask the impending holidays, more chances to get sick - more reasons to stay in one place. “Your hands are soft, like hands that turn pages,” she said, but that was before the cold air and fire from the radiator pulled the smoothness from them. Now my hands are incidental to my work, my constant tap across the keys, the pressing of pen to paper in the march towards the semester’s close. I stuff my hands into pockets, ease them into gloves, hold them unwillingly close to the heat of my body. I hardly ever see them anymore, and when I do they are a blue-tinged, tightly dry shadow of themselves.
It was 7:42 a.m.; there were a good three minutes until the bus would come. I looked down to the end of the road where the bus stopped to pick us up each morning. Demetrius ("Tree" is what his friends call him) stood there by himself, muttering bits of a song and stirring up the gravel with his feet. He was always early; he'd never missed the bus once. Tommy and Travis, on the other hand, were always late. Half the time they didn't even make the bus. On the days they didn't feel like going to school, they would leave their houses at the right time but on the way to the bus stop they would turn off and go down towards the creek. They would hang out until the bus had come and gone.

I was curious to know if they were hiding out down there today. Tree hadn't yet heard me coming, so I skidded off the road and went to see if I could find Tommy and Travis. I pushed through some bushes and thorns and skidded down the little hill that formed the creek's bank. Where the creek passed under the road there was a large concrete tunnel that had been built so that the water could flow through easily during floods. But now there was only a tiny little stream of water going through. Wisps of grey smoke were slowly rising out of the tunnel's opening--Tommy and Travis were inside, smoking.

"What you all doing down here?" I asked, peering into the tunnel.

"What's it look like we're doing?" Tommy sneered at me.

I walked farther in to show I wasn't scared. "You gonna skip school?" I said with excitement.

"Maybe," Tommy held his cigarette tightly between his thumb and forefinger and took a long drag, as if he was smoking pot--like his dad did all the time. He blew out the smoke a little too quickly and his eyes turned red. I could tell he was holding a cough in. After a minute, when he had recovered, he said, "I'm tired of school. Don't do you no good sittin' in those classrooms all day long."

"What are you gonna do instead?" I asked.

Tommy grinned and looked over at Travis, his best friend or something? "Hey, Tree! It's just me and Travis. We're going to get some beer."

"Nothin'," Travis spat out at me, "Why? You his best friend or somethin'?"

I was silent. I just looked out the end of the tunnel towards the sunlight.

"You aiggerlover?" I turned my head and looked Travis in the eye, still silent.

"Huh?" he asked loudly and then threw his cigarette butt next to me. I heard it sizzle in a puddle of water. I started to hurry out of the tunnel.

"What the hell, why you buy a beer like that?" I asked as we sat down.

"Huh?" I grunted at him. I didn't say another word until we had driven a few minutes away from the bus stop.

That afternoon when we got home from school, Tree and I decided to walk up to the store. But first he had to go home and get some money. I went with him.

Tree's house was a couple blocks down from mine. It stood off to the side at the end of the street, where the asphalt just stopped and the woods began. Looking through the trees at the edge of his yard you could see the railroad tracks running through the woods not far away. At night in my room, I could always barely hear the train going through. But I bet it was really really loud in his room. The house was covered with grey siding that looked like wood, but at the foundation you could see that it was made out of cinder blocks. There were three rooms: Tree's room, his mom's room, and the living room--which really wasn't a living room since his grandma spent all her time there, just watching t.v. all day. She even slept there, on the sofa. Sometimes you weren't sure if she was asleep or awake because she always stayed put in the same spot. "Wheel of Fortune" was playing when we came in. Her eyes were glued to the screen but I could tell she wasn't really watching it. Tree murmured some words with here and walked by. She didn't look up at me so I just followed him into his room.

"Doesn't your grandma ever get tired of just sitting there all day?" I asked.

"She don't know. She's old. She doesn't want to move I guess," he was rummaging through his sock drawer, looking for change.

"What'd happen if you just came up and turn the t.v. off while she was sitting there in front of it?" I asked him. "Do you think she'd notice?"

"I don't know. Why don't you try it," he
after school that day I went home and changed into shorts and a few feet to the side of the tracks, where there was a flat, beaten school's emblem of the tiger. I started stretching next to him. He was wearing his gym uniform from Tree there for a run. He was there already, leaning against a tree, wearing his black shorts and grey t-shirt. I walked down to the end of the street and crossed the cross-country team when we were sophomores--freshmen couldn't try out for the team. We couldn't wait to get older.

We ran together, though. About every other day we would go out near the railroad tracks in the woods and run for at least a couple miles. He showed me how to tell how far you went by looking at the little orange mile-markers off to the side of the tracks. Each week we would increase our run a little bit. We were building up our endurance so that we could make the cross-country team when we were sophomores--freshmen couldn't try out for the team. We couldn't wait to get older.

Tree finally found all the money there was to be found in his drawer, and we left for the store. It wasn't too far, just about a mile. The lady behind the counter stared at us the whole time we were in the store. I kept picking up candy and then putting it down because I couldn't decide what I wanted. Tree bought some Bubble-Blows Suckers--my favorite flavor, Cherry Red. Both of our mouths were bright red by the time we got home.

I felt a little nervous walking to the bus stop the next morning. But Tommy and Travis weren't there. Tree was there though, and we waited for the bus as usual. He had his walkman on with him and wanted me to hear a new tape he had made. He put the headphones over my head. Suddenly it hit me--the rich scent of the cocoa-butter he always puts on his skin--it came into my nose, and I could smell it as long as I had the headphones on. Deeply I breathed in the smell of him. When the song finished I gave him the headphones back.

"It's good, isn't it?" he asked and then started to mime the beat of the song by quickly pressing his lips together and releasing them.

I stood there staring at him, watching his lips move, still transfixed by the smell of his cocoa-butter. "Huh?... Yeah, yeah, it's good."

The bus doors opened in front of us. We walked to the back of the bus and found a seat. There weren't many kids on the bus yet because our stop was at the beginning of the route. I turned to Tree. "Hey, does anyone ever call you... uh... a... uh... a 'nigger'?"

He looked at me in surprise. "No... Why? You heard somebody call me that?"

"No, I was just wondering."

After school that day I went home and changed into shorts and a t-shirt. I walked down to the end of the street and crossed through the woods to the railroad tracks. I was supposed to meet Tree there for a run. He was there already, leaning against a tree, stretching his calves. He was wearing his gym uniform from school--the standard black shorts and grey t-shirt with the school's emblem of the tiger. I started stretching next to him.

"You wanna go for three miles today?" he asked.

I agreed. We had never gone that far before.

We started off at a slow pace to warm up. We ran a few feet to the side of the tracks, where there was a flat, beaten path. It was sunny day and I kept looking over at the steel rails of the tracks that were gleaming. The air felt hot and heavy in my mouth and I didn't feel like running too fast. Once we had gone about a mile, Tree sped up and took the lead. I knew he was trying to challenge me, to get me to go faster. But, I lingered behind. I looked up from the tracks and noticed his legs spinning round and round in front of me. I was fascinated by the hundred muscles and tendons flexing and relaxing so quickly. Though his legs were muscular, they were long, and his stride was as graceful as a deer's. His skin shone in the sun like metal but seemed warmer, as if it were absorbing all the light and not reflecting it.

All of a sudden we heard a train's whistle in the distance behind us. I turned my head to look. It was about a half-mile back. We ran up side by side with Tree. "We better get away from the tracks before it passes us," I told him.

Tree nodded yes. Just ahead of us was a path leading off into the woods. He turned into it and I followed him. We ran a little ways until we were out of sight of the train and then stopped. There was a small creek next to the path here--it was the same creek that ran near the bus stop, I figured. We caught our breath and listened to the train passing. Car after car loudly rumbled by. It took a few minutes for the whole train to pass. A silence came on suddenly, as the last car trauled away.

I looked around. "This is a nice spot we found. The trees were tall and thick, shutting out the sunlight, except for one place--a big flat rock that sat in the middle of the creek. Here the sun shone down brightly."

"Yeah it is," Tree said. "Let's sit here for a little bit before we go back."

I jumped over to the rock and sat down. Tree joined me and pulled off his shirt. He spread out his body over the rock, soaking up the sun. I lay down on my side, propping my head up with my arm. I closed my eyes and felt the warmth seep into me. Then I looked at Tree's back. His skin looked so beautiful in the sunlight--a deep, rich, reddish brown. I wanted to touch him. I climbed on top of him and lay down. We fit together perfectly; my knees against the backs of his knees, my stomach into the small of his back, my shoulders on his shoulders. I reached out to his hands and held them tight. His eyes again shone and felt like I was in heaven. I felt so free. We didn't say anything for more than a minute. I was getting hard and we both felt it. Tree turned his head and looked back at me. I knew I had gone too far. I got up from him and stood up. He stood up too and looked me hard in the eye. With a quiet, firm, hateful voice that I had never before heard in my life, he said, "Are you a faggot?"

I turned my head quickly away from him. I felt like someone had all of a sudden ripped out all of my insides, and left me standing there on this rock, just empty and hollow. I wanted to cry but couldn't. Tree put his shirt on, jumped down off the rock, and started running back towards the railroad tracks. After a minute I followed him.

We ran back without saying a word. When we reached our starting place, instead of stopping and stretching with him as I usually did, I just kept running--all the way until I got to my house.

The next morning everybody was at the bus stop--Demetrius, Tommy, and Travis. Tommy and Travis were sitting over to the side, looking at a dirty magazine. They didn't look at me. Demetrius was standing with his walkman on. He didn't look at me either. When the bus came, I took a seat by myself.

Demetrius and I never talked after that. When I went running, I would go on a road that led away from his house. The next year he made the cross-country team. I didn't try out. At school we tried not to look at each other, when we'd pass each other in the halls.
I stopped eating meat the year I met you
You would always forget, offering steak sandwiches—
Wanting to see my palette whet.
Raw. You liked it raw. Soft, tender
child not quite sure
believed your butchering
a blood sacrifice.
Limbs, flanks, bound in muscle sweat.
You said the protein would do me good.
That year I dreamt in red flesh tones.
Every morsel I didn't taste
given up to you—Savoring
starved looks, charring my face.

MY CORPOREALITY

CORPORATE REALITY

BOUGHT/SOLD AT RATE OF RISING ECONOM
MY BODY IS A COMMODITY

OF THE STATE.
A STATE OF CHAOS

ORDERED INTO
MY EVER DECREASING SELF OF SKIN
AND FLESH AND CREVICES,
WHERE THE POTENT AIR ENTRANCES ITSELF
AND IN THESE INCUBUSES I EMBODY
ALL THAT I DETEST.

NAIMA K. DIFRANCO
and I was not
she was not
My girlfriend just broke up with me. I dated her for almost four weeks. It wasn’t much, really, just a little something to occupy the time and give me a social life. Someone to make out with and hold when the New York City nights were cold. But she gave me a lot of thinking to do. She let me know what it was like not to be where I am today.

She was a seventeen year old girl. I can’t exactly call her a woman, because at the age of twenty anyone younger than nineteen still seems like a child to me. When I first met her I thought she was my age. It was her eyes. They were deep eyes, full of a knowledge I could never know and full of a lifestyle that I would never live. She had been on her own since the age of fourteen. Lived in shelters, homes, institutions, apartments, and on the streets. Her face might actually be familiar to you, if you have been at Tiffany’s diner down on West 4th Street at three o’clock in the morning, eating a plate of fries and glancing over at the table where a number of lost souls are sitting; sipping cold coffee and discussing the waitress who stands idly nearby with a squashed cigarette. “Kids!” you may have thought. “Don’t they have a place to go?”

I have seen what the gay youth of Manhattan can go through. Most of the people I have met have been tossed carelessly into the system without a thought. Served a sentence in the psych ward, did their time on the streets, left their homes when living was too much. All so young, too. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, barely old enough to have graduated high school, yet lived through abuse, rape, gay-bashing, and more.

I sat at Tiffany’s one night, listening to a black bisexual man react to my ex-girlfriend’s telling of the boy who raped her. “He told us a story; of his dear father, the man he once loved and deeply respected, who had sexually harassed fourteen women at his job. I watched as he looked far away and thought of this man. “He got off,” he said softly, blinking away the gathering tears. “Fourteen fucking women. And he walked free.”

He lowered his eyes. He was homeless. Twenty-one and homeless. He came to New York from the Midwest to find a new life, to get away from a home which
provided him nothing. And what did he find? The corner table at Tiffany’s, where on most nights they wouldn’t kick him out when he fell asleep, his head down on the table.

He sometimes slept on the PATH train, other nights in a shelter up in the Bronx. But he loved people, and cared for everyone he met. He opened up to me within a half hour of meeting him, and he’d smile when he saw my face, giving me a hug and being genuinely happy to see me. He’d hold me close and tell me everything was okay, caring the way no one really cared for him.

One night, my seventeen year-old girlfriend said to me, “I want to show you where I used to live.” We boarded the A-train at one o’clock in the morning, and got off at Fulton Street. “One night Tommy and I were so cold we begged the manager of that place to open two hours early just to let us in,” she said, as we passed a deserted Burger King. We arrived at South Street Seaport. She took me down a dock, and stopped next to a wooden box about six feet long, two feet wide, and two feet high. “That’s where I used to live,” she said, pointing to that box and laughing a bit as she thought about it. “With Tommy. Last winter, for two months.” She pointed up to a balcony atop the stores and said, “That’s where Desi first told me she loved me.” We went up to that balcony, and I stood looking out on the water, waiting for her to tell me more. She grasped the railing and did not spare me a glance, her mind far away in a place I could never reach.

Her prominent expression was one of sadness. It was rare to see her truly happy. And I miss those rare moments, because I thought perhaps some of those smiles were due to me, the pre-med music major at Barnard College of Columbia Fucking University, who had everything going for her, and never realized it until then.

The corner booth’s at Tiffany’s provides a view of homelessness not seen in the Upper West Side. The teenagers who hop subway turnstiles out of necessity, curl up in diner booths just to get a good night’s rest, and can never even dream of being anywhere else. The ones who have been in AA before reaching legal drinking age, and laugh at you because of jealousy, and not hatred. I was once their age, pondering my college acceptances, my only worry being which school would give me the best education.

That fifteen year old drag queen might have AIDS. That long-haired girl with the tongue piercing is seventeen, just ran away from home; and has been attending NA for her cocaine addiction for two years. That guy in the nice leather coat with the glasses? He is trying to scrounge change to get to the homeless shelter before curfew. That beautiful eighteen-year old you may recognize from the GMHC ads. She just got kicked out of her apartment, lost her job, and is two thousand dollars in debt. That sixteen year old to-be actor performing his own monologue to uncaring ears is bumming a quarter, ‘cause he’s going to be late in getting back to his group home Avenue A. That teen in the Metallica t-shirt is hiding a bottle of Peppermint Schnapps in her bag, because she desperately needs love, and can only find it in a glass bottle.

And that twelve year-old boy in the MC with the sad look? That just might be a seventeen year-old lesbian, paying her rent from her dead father’s social security money. And she just happened to be my girlfriend. And although she still owes me a flannel shirt, twenty-two dollars and about ten packs of cigarettes, she still deserves a smile. And if you happen to catch her eye, go over to her table and offer her a smoke. If you have an extra dollar, she’d love to have a bagel, but don’t be surprised when she put salt on top of the cream cheese and jelly. Sit down with her and her friends and drink an endless cup of coffee. You may learn a lot. I certainly have.
WHAT WE FEAR

WE TRY TO KEEP CONTAINED
Don’t you go and dare me to love you because I’ll do it.
You might not like what comes out the other end (thorned stench of me, my girl-bristles).

You might not smile at what comes out but it’s yours and the cooped-up heat will unleash her weight and fuck you giant and heavy.

Dare me? Oh, sweetheart, I’m not in any tender mood. I’m in a ripping mood, I’m ready to steal you whether or not you’re ready to give.

I’m in no graceful mood tonight I’m in a shaking mood ready to tell the thing ready to hear it willing to beat flesh, willing to scar.

Dare me? Still yourself as I shriek-back into the night and pull out my love-chains, sadize you. Listen to my hell-hound howl, a fire-breather this poisons eater whose body aches for pain. Dare me? to tear the words out of you, tear diamond tears in your eyes. Let loose the shaking cry from your belly and let me in.

I’m in no gentle mood tonight, dear. I flip you on your back, you are winded, mouth open for air. But I won’t let you go you in my bed wetting the sheets until we’re done. Ripping through the night, my grunt-cries raise you from your corner until you shudder and rock the bed once more.
Close to midnight, tangled moon, a slim thigh caught
In a glance, a grainy whir of a crew cut,
Harsh blond, bared fantasy. Last night a woman
Followed me into

My dreams. She wasn’t you. Over-sexed fray ed edge,
She’ll hang off me all day, like a one night stand.
Crack of the eight ball, slammed, sunk, cleans the table
Subconscious pocket,

Leather thick curve of her gloved hand on my ass,
Cool rim of a beer, a stranger’s eye, unstrange
And fiercely intimate. The colored balls smack
Against each other,

Wake me from my sleep. I pull the blinds, switch on
Late afternoon talk radio, brew six cups,
Slide into my jeans. Like a bad influence,
Dusk climbs in my bed.
Why do my favorite things always come in the smallest packages? And only the bow holds them together--to loosen it means the gift shatters, five foot two and three quarter inches in pieces on my floor. I suppose I'll be plucking your eyelashes out of my pillowcase for a few days.

My bedroom walls are pale cream, grimed over with thirty years of boot marks and tape, sweaty fingerprints and aimless doodles at desk height. My favorite postcard is taped up next to the door: a boy sits straddling the edge of a fence, silhouetted against the empty sky. Sometimes I think he's maybe really a girl. If it were you in the photograph, you'd be stretched out along the top, soaking up the sun. You wouldn't notice how far away you were from everyone. If it were me, the hair would be shorter and there would be a glint of jewelry at my ear catching the sunlight from behind the shadow. I would feel the height, the depth of the air around me. I could never sit so still, my hands hanging loosely at my sides--my arms would reach from one edge of the picture to the other, sucking up the sky.

I miss the sky. Here it comes in slices between the buildings and never gets black enough. I like the soft velvet pink it turns on snowy nights, and the thick blue of late evening, but in Texas the night sky was black. It made me feel like I was in one of the shoebox dioramas I made in third grade, the walls painted with heavy tempura black and the stars just holes poked through the lid. I can imagine the white-hot light of a lamp glinting through, warming the box to the soft heat of a summer night. I'm alone there, breathing the thick air and listening to the crickets and the whippoorwill call. But still, the thought creeps in: I wish you were here so I could show you how to watch for deer at the corn feeder on the hill.

The pole in my subway car is greased with sweat, the thick hard metal dulled. The roar of another train falls behind us, lust in the clunking rhythm of my train. I love the days it's been snowing or raining and the floor of the subway car is patterned with shoeprints and circles and rough lines solid in dirt. My boots are still wet and the prints beneath them slick into broad stripes as I rub my foot against the floor. My boots used to have square toes, but once you stood on them and wrapped your arms around me as I waltzed around the room and the toes are rounded now. The salt from the old street leaves rippled white stains on the leather and crusts against the circles of metal at my ankles. Everybody writes about black leather boots. Mine make me taller. And hard nosed like my reinforced toes.

The shape of my thigh in my leggings makes me want to shave past the hair, trimming the fat beneath. I am wider than I like. The hairs curling below my belly are too bold, crawl too far up in a thin line to my navel. Thin because I pluck it. My friend complains loudly about how prickly her legs are. She hasn't shaved in a week and her blond legs feel like peach skin to me but she tells me they're gross. I don't shave anymore because I had to do it everyday and I could still feel the dark tips scattered across my ugly legs. Your legs are even hairier than mine. You're brave. I loved the way they felt when my hands drew the hairs straight into the air on dry mornings while the static electricity made sparks between our blankets.

This morning the sky was beautiful, a bright blue white stripe against the sparkling windows next door and the pinwheel reflections of light on the bricks. I could see
the Statue of liberty through the grime of the subway window. She was far away and crisp against the clear sky. As the train rounded the curve of the tracks between Smith and Carroll streets, I watched workers in orange jackets rest on the third rail of the empty track next to my window. You were a construction worker last Halloween, dressed in drag with a hard hat and an orange vest. I gave you sideburns and a mustache with L’oreal Brown-Black. I think that was the night we watched the tunnels through the windows of the first subway car. The tracks were littered with wet cardboard and soda cans, broken plastic pencils and rats.

Tracks. I think of a lonely wide field burned by the sun and crossed by an old railroad path. No trains come through here anymore. There are bits of things wedged between the ties--ragged white strips of cloth, a piece of a dirty paper bag, someone’s baseball cap. Clutches of weeds poke through the cracks in the wood, and a thin parade of ants edges quickly across the hot steel. The crevices are filled with dust and the dry dirt around the tracks is pocked with the inverted cones of doodlebug homes. I don’t miss those tracks as much as I do the ones I shared with you.

Sometimes I’m angry because I think you know much more than I do. I try to make myself remember that you don’t know about the barn at my house. It isn’t red. It’s a pale yellow, the paint cracking and curling from the aging boards. The right half of it has been converted into several dusty rooms. They aren’t dusty from lack of use, but from the hot earth blowing in through the cracks in the windowframes. There’s a bedroom, a bathroom, and one room that is everything else. Juan and Romero live there now. They’ve added a toaster oven and bought a griddle to make tortillas with on the gas stove. The room smells like sweat and white coloche dirt and unwashed hair and pork grease. You don’t know how the pink insulation fibers squeeze through the walls in places, or how the porch is rotting through, or about the sound of rain falling through the roof and into the black pot beneath the leak.

I think it’s worse to be lonely in a small room on the tenth floor than it is in a big empty house or in the woods. In a building filled with people there’s my small empty room, not even big enough for anyone but me. I wish I had to make room. I used to sweat myself to sleep when you stayed over, the two of us crushed into a twin bed, wrapped into each other. You seemed comfortable enough. You were comfortable with other women in your bed the night after you slept with me. I wish I hadn’t minded. I’d invite you over now.

There is particular delight to the word “dyke.” Hard, short, clear staccato word that means sweetness and heat and myself. It means the best kiss I ever had. The hot sweet breath in the hollow of my neck, the fine fuzz of your cheek skin against mine, the flooding shock of a full face kiss, circles of silk, your nose sliding below my chin, your forehead smoothing my dry lips, the taste of your eyelashes and cheekbones and finally the thin sweet line of your lips drawing mine into your woman’s mouth, sucking me into your first kiss again.

I love this phrase: “filling my palms with your jaw.” Oh, I’d love to do that now, to give my palms to you to feel against your skin, your neck, your collarbone. If I were to break your collarbone what would you do? I didn’t know I was still angry at you.

In the wee hours of the morning, looking out my tenth-floor window, I see squares of light in a blanket of buildings and the reflection of the cloisonne lamp smooth behind me. I’m thinking about misty rain and my new girlfriend and a fireplace with “Texas” spelled out in stone above it. My computer just ate the story I had half-finished about you. It’s okay because I don’t think you fit into a third-person narrative. You’re not far enough away--just two buildings over, in a room on the fourth floor. I miss you, but not enough.
I wake
tangled in you.
Our bodies
bruised with love and lipstick.
(Your signature blackberry
on my ankle).
I trail my thumbnail
down the rail of your chest
as if I could split open your
deep breath
and peel away
your soft layers.
Unearth the Granite pain
that some man
(you never tell me who)
had shoved deep inside
of you.
I would suck out the poison,
crack it with my strong teeth
(sharpened by what I’ve had to eat to survive,
what I’ve had to swallow)
masticate and spit it out of
our apartment window.
And in that space,
I’d lay my promises
to grow between the warmth of
your breasts.
TOKEn's very own PERSONALS

Top

seeking Bottom

A Real Man Wanted
I want a man. No fats, boys, or queens, just a real man. I'm a GWM, 34, 6', 165#, shaved head, submissive bottom, looking for an aggressive, dominant top. Real men are aggressive, dominant, big, bold, and hairy.

A Real Man's Ad
Are you ready for something real? I'm 21, Italian/Jewish, a submissive bottom, short, 120#, brown eyes and hair, clean-shaven, smooth body, comfortable with my emotions, funny, love life, seeking special guy, 23-29, who loves life. Drug and disease-free.

Fucked Real Men
I want to fuck real men, long and hard, until they bleed. Gay men need not apply, only real men wanted. Me: 10X® cock, stunning face.

Chelsea Muscleslut Wanted
Good-Looking GWM, 21, 5'9", 135#. I like going to clubs, bars, movies, dinner, quiet evenings at home, restaurants, eating, dining out, drinks, coffee, juice, and water. I'm looking for a good-looking Chelsea muscle boy, white, with similar interests. Must be HIV-, no fats, no fees.

Seeking Ebony Prince
GWM, 32, 6', in shape, sincere, seeks GBM, muscular, aggressive, and not into games. Must be spontaneous and looking for friendship, love, romance and more.

Hung Man
seeking relationship
BM, 6', 180#, 45° chest, 30° waist, 6'5", 14", 22", 67", 2.3", 45°, smooth, tight, muscular build, works out 4
or 5 times a week (sometimes 6 or 7 times) dark-skinned, shaved head, into black or Hispanic men, masculine, professional, muscular, into a relationship.

Want to be Strangled?
I'd love to do it to you. You must have a gym body, be disease free, and love long walks on the beach.

Ruffneck Wanted
Bi curious PRM, 21, very good-looking, straight-acting and in the closet, 5'9", 150, seeking other PRM, 18-25, ruffneck/houncy boy who is

Bottom

seeking Top

Two Roommates
Two GWMs, 25 and 26, Italian-American roommates, very good-looking, great bodies, great personalities, great everything. We are seriously seeking men with same qualities who are masculine and emotionally stable. Be 23-33, drug and disease free. No fats, fees, freaks. Race unimportant.

Worked-Out Top Sk8 Bottom
Seeking little brother for sex or relationship.

Worn-Out Bottom Sk8 Top
I been fucked so much I can't even feel my ass. If you can deal with my trunk-butt and are brave enough that you think you can make me feel it, let's get together.

Attention Straight and Married Men
If you're looking to get a good blow-job from a good-looking Puerto Rican guy, leave a message.

Ballet Dancers Wanted
Tall, handsome, Latino-Creole type, clean-cut, 9° uncut, 32° waist, strong dancer's build, seeks young, hot, bouncing, tanned, beautiful, smooth, elliptic, cantaloupe, bubble butt buns who love to get fucked and eaten by a pro.

Sodomite
Older man of Mediterranean descent seeks large numbers of men and women for lavo, debaucherous, gay, fun orgies. Let's light a fire together.

Bitch Boy
Really hot swimmer, 25, 5'9", 155#, 29° waist, 8°, really hot bubble butt, looking to put together a group of hot top gang fucks. I want to be a total real bitch bottom for four or five hot tops.
How to Respond to an Ad -- Send a nude photo and an explicit explanation of what kind of sexual activities you’re seeking to: Senator Jesse Helms, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510. Make sure to include the reference number of the ad to which you are responding.
reprinted from Lisa liamheart zine issue two

I'm sure many of you less pc types have already discovered what I'm about to describe. And hopefully you more pc types will not take offense because it's all in good fun, I promise.

Okay, this is what you do: on a day when you and your friends are hanging out with nothing to do (and I'm sure these are few and far between), congregate around a telephone. Then put your heads together and think of the most disgusting, sexist, explicit combinations of three and four letter words possible. Next step? Dial them up. Chances are you'll reach a phone sex line.

The reason I know this is because this summer I spent a lot of time in empty rooms with coworkers, a phone, and nothing to do. You could hear the wheels turning in our heads, and then someone would suddenly grab the phone and start dialing. After a while we started getting adventurous and making big words, or combining letters and numbers. Like this: we started off simple, with stuff like 1-800-BIG-TITS and 1-800-SAT-TWAT. Then we moved on to 1-800-HOT-FLESH (the extra H is for HOT, HOT, HOT) and 1-800-WETSUM. Eventually we hit on 1-800-LESBIAN. The best part, though, was when we got really ridiculous ones like 1-800-JEW-GIRL and 1-800- FAT-SLUT.

It's great fun, as I'm sure you can tell, and completely risk free because the 1-800 lines are just recordings that talk dirty for a second and then ask for your credit card number. If you feel a bit guilty about letting such horrid words run through your pristine little heads, think of this as a sociological study. A journey into the minds of testosterone driven men and the people who cater to them. (God, there are a million and one of these studies just waiting to be done; most people don't even have to leave their homes to compile enough research to write a doctoral thesis.) Plus, with each call you make you're ripping off the man because the phone sex companies have to pay for it. Anyway, it's really fascinating to figure out how the whole thing works. For instance, anything that begins with HOT will get you the same recording. Same with WET. I never imagined just how huge an industry this phone sex stuff is. I was also surprised that we couldn't find any gay sex lines. We tried 1-800-HOMO-BOY and all sorts of others but none of them worked. And of course all the "lesbian" lines were aimed at men. 1-800-HOT-KATE works though, and that makes up for any other shortcomings.
TOKEN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Crushes
Protesting the St. Patrick's Day Parade (Molly is a lesbian/Danny-boy is queer/
St. Patrick is a drag queen. We'll be there every year)
The cute brown-haired Jewish boy in my Theory of Biology class

Stretch Vinyl
Lesbian supermodels

Tear Jerkers
Wreaking girl havoc

Camomile tea with Absolut Citroen Vodka
Pussy Breath

Plastic bead Dominican Flag Necklaces

Blain Magazine
Email friends I've never met who make me feel better about my life because their lives suck so hard

My leash and collar

The two emotionally stable guys at Columbia I've heard so much about but
have never had the pleasure to meet

Wire bottles with long necks
Jesus Sandles

Spending the night in 302 "Liberated Hall." Enthic Studies at Columbia NOW.

Hello Kitty

OTHER PEOPLE'S GIRLFRIENDS
Pretentious postmodern theory

Knee Socks

Alec Sandor (A Room with a View, not Maurice)

THE WORLD WIDE WEB
Cybergrils

異軍突起

Queercore