

BOOK THREE

WE LEARN FROM HERSTORY

Politeness can be a trap, and [she] was caught in the web of [his] courtesy. "As you wish," she wrote back and what made her write this was not entirely guilt, but also something untranslatable, a law which obliged her to pretend that [his] words meant no more than they said. This law is called takallouf. To unlock a society, look at its untranslatable words. Takallouf is a member of that opaque, world wide set of concepts which refuse to travel across linguistic frontiers: it refers to a form of tongue-tying formality, a social restraint so extreme as to make it impossible for the victim to express what he or she really means, a species of compulsory irony which insists, for the sake of good form, on being taken literally.

Salman Rushdie

CHAPTER ONE

NEW MATH

"I find sex absolutely terrifying. Love can be going on in a smooth ordered way, integrating itself through long walks and long talks and kisses in sweet soft places. Then clothes come off and genitals unite and all other unities disappear. We live in an ignorant world. A dark ages, not of intellect, but of soul.

"We are buried in materiality. So, when we arrive at the materialization of love, we assume that it can hold the symbolic essence, the weight, of love itself. It can't. Sexual love is one tangible proof of love's existence. Sex cannot be more than the manifestation of the nature of the souls through whom it is manifesting.

"Love is meant to materialize through all our comings and goings, talkings and pleadings, sensory expansions and passions. Love is the engine that powers activity. Love actualizes events. Love is God in action. Love is the vernacular, street slang name for the fecund blackness from which life emerges. Sex is like any other dance, like talking or walking, dancing or thinking. Sex is an aspect, an activity, of love. Religions refuse to allow us to become expert at this action. There are no open competitions. There are no schools. There are few texts, the

ones that do exist are filled with the most obvious manifested truths: *Just the facts, ma'am*. Or crude property-mad patriarchal blunders: the younger the better.

"In America, women long for a sexual union that is romantic and fulfilling. Movies, books, peers and parents encourage this dream, promote it, sell products by means of it, clothes are worn to gain it, education pursued to win it, careers attained to deserve it and so on. Men are indoctrinated early, told they must perform on the sexual playing field, perform for a critical, demanding audience judging, perhaps condemning, certainly scoring the size of their penum, the duration of their performance, the grandeur of their automobile, the extravagance of their income and appetite. All this is sex to the American man. In our country everything is sexualized, except sex. Real sex, the stuff that happens between people that transcends possibility and understanding, life pulsing, driven, creative, touching that leads us to inner unity, harmony, pleasure and peace, is carefully, dutifully, prudily, righteously ignored.

"There is nothing in the realm of the physical that is not improved with practice, care, concern, awareness and skill. The physical is the realm in which these disciplines are essential. Sex is a physical process. It is appropriate to consider sex as an art form or a sport. Yet we persist in perceiving sex as something which must be left untouched by awareness, glibly attended to with care and concern only when disasters like disease and unwanted pregnancy rear their ugly heads. Practice? My God! Ponder even apprenticeship and I guarantee that the average person will leap from her chair in rage and disgust. As if practice could make the sacred profane.

"If she ever returns to her chair, if ever, as she circumnavigates her life, it occurs to her to ponder this once more, she might be able to think of a few times, looking far back, or not so far back, when she would have welcomed an elder, a wisdom, a practice, an improvement in her ability to communicate her love.

"In the early days of America there were several communities concerned with redefining sexuality. One in particular has always fascinated me. In the Oneida community, the men were taught, taught each other, to orgasm without releasing sperm. They were able to govern their own birth control. They reported increased sensual pleasure for themselves and their wives, but also they achieved trust in their relationships to their wives. The women were grateful to be relieved of the responsibility for and fear of pregnancy every time they made love. No one can tell me that every woman, for the thirty or forty years that she is fertile, wants to make a baby every time she physicalizes her love.

"Copulation is often called making love because one ritual aspect of sex is the coming together, pun intended, with another human being, in order to release into the other, the joyful, magical mystery of the wholeness of creation, in order to realize the energies underpinning the whole shebang, in order to take potential energy and turn it into love.

What lovely ideas! Jacqui may be right, sex could be the new frontier. In the broadest sense, it does seem as though the core of most crises in relationships. Your people have the most complicated couplings, and AIDS, that's really about relationships, isn't it? Knowing your body and feeling secure enough to talk to your lover about his or her body, their past experiences. Good heavens, our generations would never have been capable of that openness, before sex. They have to be that open. It boggles the mind. The abundance of violent sex in the media, that seems such an inappropriate way to express the need to connect passionately.

If we view a society as if it were an individual, apply analyses of process similar to those we apply to the life of an individual, "normal" relationships bespeak a massive repression, viz the moral majority defining morality strictly in terms of sex, flagrantly leaving out issues of justice, equality and ethical decision making. Of course the moral majority do not define morality as the highest expression of the inner peace that comes from self-knowledge. These so called majority moralists are concerned with "the problem" of social control. It's the struggle between orthodoxy and life. Most of us live in the middle somewhere, benefiting both from the stability of following the old ways and from the stimulation of attempting something new.

When my father left the synagogue, he said that the Jewish religion was betraying the spirit of its truth. He said that the purpose of law is to protect the people. He said that's what made the Jews strong, their laws were good for their people. He said that religion is an aspect of community, not its defining principal. Definitions of health change, they modify in time, through time and living. The same dietary rules necessary for people living centuries before, in deserts, was not healthy for people living today in cities. Old ways can be efficacious but if they stultify, the people do the same. If we live a rigid pattern, we become rigid people. He followed some traditional practices, like the day of rest, respect for life, talking to God. But he thought that bacon was delicious, and safe when fully cooked. Milk products and meat no longer subject to rampant bacterial deteriorations, could be held to close encounters with no harm done to kith or kin. It took me a long time to fully appreciate the courage it took him to get my mother to abandon her kosher conservative household. They lost some of their old friends, they had to change synagogues. It couldn't have been easy for them. It makes me proud to think of it. He would certainly have gotten a kick out of a woman Rabbi! He used to wish for women cantors, a cantoresse!

We were flying through the stars, I felt myself to be a space traveler. Everyone seemed to be watching the movie or sleeping. Jacqui and I were still talking. I told her about my father, how his freeing himself from his orthodoxy meant that he was able to be supportive of me and what I wanted to do, that he thought it

made sense that women be healthy, and happy too, for how could communities sustain themselves if women were grieving their lives away.

I find myself intrigued by that lawyer Jacqui dreams about. I imagine her standing, facing a row of black robed justice. "If it please your honor." Her arguments flow, smooth as honey, quick as a spring thaw in a mountain river, clear as the night sky, filled with a batrillion points of light, the knowledge streaming from those stars. She speaks of justice, and equality, the values which make a country strong. She speaks of subtle oppressions which limit the varieties of our pursuits of happiness. She speaks of the gratitude of our unborn sons and daughters, the gratitude of people living now, people anxiously awaiting the annihilation of the last human slavery, the greatest perversity, the central hypocrisy, that rot infusing every thing good we try to do, infusing our hopes with its stench. "What matters the vote if an unequal vote? What matters the love if an unequal love? What matters the voice if an unequal voice? What matters the life if an unequal life? We recognize that in God's eyes we are all equal, but, in this country, in this city, in this state, according to the law of the United States of America, women are not equal. The law will fall short when it reaches for divinity and fall short it must. But let us have the courage to reach nevertheless, reach further, longer, harder, better, reach until at least our law conforms to the ethical spirit of justice and equality upon which the hope and the health of our society depends."

She will melt their hearts, as she has mine. Down will tumble their resistance, up will come the jubilee, rising from the debris of broken lies, truth revealing her eternal face. "Next you will want equality for children," the hard hearted will accuse. "Why not protect the entire natural world?" We will answer. "Allow women in and you'll be opening the door to equality for everything. Never. Over my dead body." Responds the modern savage. "I prefer sex with blinders, women pregnant and barefoot, rusted coat hangers, children beyond sanity killing parents crazed with violence beyond idiocy."