

CHAPTER EIGHT

ALL

"You are carrying a bucket on a string around your neck. You are meant to fill this bucket with self love because, if you don't, people will throw their garbage, or worse, in your bucket as they pass by. An empty bucket is an invitation. If some one or some ones have chucked their garbage down or up-chucked their vomit into your bucket, you are under no obligation to take up your spoon and eat from this love bucket turned grunge trough," said the nurse. We had come, she said, to learn to fill our buckets with self love and keep them filled. First we would learn to stop eating the grotesque bits remaining. Then we would learn to dump the garbage out. Next we would fill ourselves up, stay filled to the brim, with yummy, juicy self love. Then we would feast with delight

"This is the most interesting thing that has ever happened to me, being stuck, squirming, in a room full of other victims. We were able to overcome the putrid stench of pathetic self minimizing, grok our culture's love affair with death. All the power that ever was or will be is here now, said a poster on the wall in the room full of us.

"You can try and not be who you are but it doesn't work.

"I could read when I was four years old. I have always been very verbal. Whenever I have been in groups of all women I am struck by the fact of our wordlessness, by the vastness of internal experience for which we simply cannot find words. Ironic, considering that we are the chatty gender. We talk too much because we can't speak from the center of our experiences. Either the words are missing or, when there are words for what we feel, we are restrained by convention, or our own desire to preserve a good, nice, clean, world, a world which women, for the most part, feel the burden of responsibility for creating and preserving.

"How to speak of horror, ravages and despair and not shatter the fabric of the universe of peace, the weave we are weaving every day, raising children to share, teaching compassion, living servility, cooking, cleaning, keeping track of everyone's smells. What would happen if we quit, if we stopped reaching for another thread, if the shuttle stopped?

"Did you hear about the strike in Iceland, when all the women went on strike, including the president, who happened to be a woman? I read this in the alternative women's press. It wasn't reported in the New York Times, it must not have been fit to print, not enough girls in swimsuits in Iceland.

"The dilemma of the wordfull woman: To speak or not to speak. Remember Cuomo, standing there, on the eve of the right wing deconstruction of America, talking about the deafening silence, himself on the eve of his own silence.

"If the only one allowed to speak is the one without shame, without secrets, without faults, or petty crimes, then there is no one.

"Jesus lost his temper at that bush, hung out with prostitutes, didn't wear shoes, I mean, he was hardly the IBM ideal spokesperson. Buddha was a self indulgent rich kid whose sex life makes Kennedy's, King's and Hart's look like mere adolescent follies. And Mohammed? Well, do we only count what he did with his wives?

"Life is an abundant madness that usurps our senses, that drowns us in its beauty and its terror, gives us the opportunity to realize within and among its manifest complexity the simplicity that rises within and among us not in spite of our temptations, our weaknesses, our sins, but because of them.

"All this I learned in a room full of victims. A room full of the crucified. The heart of the world. Women. We climbed on the rocks of our despair, over hills of our learned indifference, through canyons of memory, under waterfalls of pain. We crossed the desert of our feelings lost, and found the oasis of our hopes, the well of our opinions, the blessed peace of our own understandings.

"What we came to understand was, to make a long story short, that all the civilizations that anyone in that room had ever heard of, read about or lived in, were based on rape, forced relationships to others.

"Rape is only necessary when people have lost the ability to merge. Rape is the result of the longing to be with the other, thwarted, repressed, enlarged, enraged. Rape is validated by conventional marriage, in which wives and children are considered possessions. Rape is what we have done to the land. Rape is what we have done to the rivers. Rape is what we have done to ourselves. Rape is coming together with an other in fear. Rape is what our judgmental God does to us. Rape is what our dominant groups do to our less fortunate. Rape is self defeating. Rape is everywhere. Rape involves forced acquiescence. Rape is force. Rape reverses the spiritual orders. Rape is contrary to natural law. People who repeatedly participate in rape lose the ability to appreciate more sensible, sensual, stimulations. People wounded or destroyed by physical, psychological, emotional, or mental rape number the majority of the entire population of the planet. Rape is the initiation, the act that confers membership, into most documented patriarchal civilizations. Rape is a door into hate, manipulation, force, fear, and falsity. Rape is epidemic. Rape is a plague. Rape kills humanity.

"Rape has a concomitant experience, silence. This silence is the obverse of wholly centered silence, it is the sensation of numb blankness, the despond of despair.

"What is the matter with you? Don't you love me? No one will believe you. You will lose everything if you tell. It's no big deal. Why are you saying these terrible things? You'll learn to like it. Marry me. Who do you think you are? You don't want me to go to jail do you? I can satisfy you. Whatever happens happens. I'm your relative. It's exciting isn't it? Everybody does it. No one will like you if you tell. Don't be a sissy. Lost your sense of humor? You asked for it. Who would believe a dirty thing like you? You want it. Don't tell. You don't love me. That didn't happen. You liked it didn't you? You're lying. Well now you've done it. You better not tell anyone. It doesn't count. Let's do it again. Cops side with grownups. No one will respect you if they know. This did not happen. The best you can do now is forget it and go on. It is your fault. You are so pathetic. Do it for me. Can't you ever enjoy life?"

"For six months we worked in the landscape of this cratered war zone. At last we got the lay of the land. We were victorious, our fear did not diminish us. When we began we were embarrassed and ashamed. We had no respect for ourselves. We felt we were cowards. We considered ourselves stupid. We thought we were losers. Confronting our fears regarding the expression of, not only the facts of our cases, but the emotions lurking in and around those facts, the act of confronting our fear, the resulting outpouring of emotion, led us to peace. As our personal hells were transformed into temples we experienced the meeting of peaceful minds.

"We found respect for ourselves. we were the most courageous people we had ever met. We were a compassionate, interesting, varied group of persons, full of life and love. The only way we could have been cowed into submission to the stratified norms of force and fear was through acts of extreme violence, like rape. We were true spirited warriors of the new age. This was beyond feminism, beyond communism, beyond angels and ancestors, God, Devil. Beyond because beneath.

"In a room without a view, a room full of women, in a room in a basement, with a little crotchety lady nurse sitting outside our circle. She would witness thousands of women in her time, go through that circle of terror into the light of the center of their gentleness, into gratitude for their own sweet softness. A room full of circle. A circle full of women.

"Peace began in a room full of wounded warrior humans, scared, and very, very sad."