

## CHAPTER TEN

### THAT EVER WAS

"There were six of us. We were asked to promise each other anonymity, to never tell what we heard there. So I won't tell it the way it was, I will mix it up. Even mixed up I'm sure you'll get the idea of how we were and what we did for ourselves, for each other. I tell these things, not as gossip, not as character defamations or morality tales; I tell these tales in order to break the worst cruelty that was done to us. I tell you these stories to honor the dishonor of unshared sorrow. I tell you about our circle of women because it travels with me, through my life, on this plane, flying fast into the night, into the stars, to my beloved on the other side. I will tell you about Jacqui, Barbara, Paris, Robin, Mary and Karen. I will tell you because this story, the story of fear abandoned, is a story that will be told, woman to woman until fear releases all its captives and women are free at last. I sing these stories to that the stars themselves will shine on all those of us who have wished on them for relief, release from terror into an easy experience of joy.

"First we talked about peripherals, phobias and disasters, the things that occurred and accrued before we were willing to believe, face, what we had been trying to push down, hide. The events, the feelings that we had, we found impossible to integrate into the core of our being. Our souls rejected the horrors, we had pushed them into phobias, disasters, negative behavior patterns. Now we were here to push them out, out, out. Let them be forever gone.

"One of us was deathly afraid of bees because when she was raped there was a bee trapped in the corner buzzing wildly. She wanted the bee to save her by stinging the asshole. It didn't. She hated bees, whenever she heard one, terror rose up from her guts, flew to her throat, choked her to gasping wordlessness. One of us threw up whenever she smelled peonies. She got dizzy if she saw them. She had been raped for years. In the summers, he liked to take her between rows of flushed peonies in her great aunt's garden. One of us was bulimic. She threw up on any provocation. One of us couldn't sleep. Her dreams were unbearable to her. One of us couldn't work. She was unable to deal with authority figures without trembling, stuttering or raging. One of us was suicidal. She planned complicated scenarios for killing herself and periodically practiced self-maiming. One of us had tried to kill herself. One of us was on anti-depressants. One of us was too thin. One of us was too fat. One of us wanted to go back to school but was scared of failing. One of us was in school achieving the highest honors, she thought she was a failure. One of us had never told anyone else what had happened to her. One of us had been rescued by a police team. One of us had been raped by a family member. One of us had told her mother who refused to talk about it. One of us couldn't tell her already depressed and medicated mother. One of us told her mother who prayed for her daughter's salvation every day, she thought that her daughter was unclean,

cursed, unfit for decent life. One of us had told her father. When he offered her money for an abortion, she took it; she wasn't pregnant. None of us had gotten pregnant from being raped except one of us who was married to her rapist.

"We came to understand over the course of that year that women and men were both victims and terrorists, that rape went beyond gender, that it was the sacrificial initiatory rite of passage necessary for inclusion in the prevailing cultures. The distinction of gender often determined levels of awareness, for instance, women were, in our experience, in ourselves, much more comfortable with being victims than in being perps.

"In our minds, in actuality, it became abundantly clear that no one was a victim who was not also a perp. Even if one's psychological make up made it impossible to perp on others, we perped on ourselves. When people are caught in a consciousness grid which includes victimization, they will perp somewhere, on their pets, on their children, on their servants, their customers, their parents, strangers. Once operating within a grid opposites will actualize.

"The first step in dealing with being a victim, in overcoming victimization, what all the battered women's shelters, rape hotlines, crisis centers, know and teach, is that we are each in control of our lives. The tricky part is in dealing with minds and emotions long schooled in the seesaw mentemotality of abuse, because what they then hear is, "It's your fault."

"Being responsible, in control of what happens to us, is not the same as being to blame for everything that happens to us. Taking responsibility is not the same as taking the blame. But the distinction is hard, sometimes impossible to grasp at first. "Leave it for later, but remember it, when you're ready to understand it, it will make sense. All you need to know now is that you are not powerless. You are in charge of your life."

"Sometimes when someone's been hurt they say to themselves, "I'll never hurt again. I'll be the one who drops, kicks, punches, leaves, wins. I'll be the perp next time. It's got to be better than being the victim." But the really crazy thing about this game is that the law of cause and effect operates as surely as the law of gravity to perpetuate the pain. This is the reality fundament of most police stories. This is the psychological profile of most success scenarios.

"Indeed, because success story persons experiencing victimization (that pungent molecular reality check) will be under social pressure not to admit to it, their truth enters the realm of un and sub conscious activities. And the losers, the feel-sorry-for-me-I-had-so-much-trouble-in-my-life-you-would-never-know-or-understand-the-terrible-things-that-happened-to-me people balance themselves with after-what-I've-experienced-I-can-do-anything-to-you-hurtful-demeaning-humiliating-perverse-because-it's-only-the-merest-fraction-of-what-I've-been-through attitudes.

**"A victim is a perp with a billion excuses to the contrary and a perp is a victim locked in a closet, the key tucked safely in their breast pocket.**

**"Before we learned this, before we took this first crucial step, there were months of stories, gallons of tears alone in the dark, abyssfull moments, real unfun stuff. But once we started stepping, we were stunned by our completeness, its inescapableness pulled us forward. We were worse off than before we began, more miserable, more scared, more aware of our stigmatization. We wanted to give up a million times between us, still our potential pulled us far, then further along the journey into the center of our selves."**