

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### IS

"One of us is fat, very fat. At first the rest of us assume that she's too fat to have sex. That her fat is a protection against her sexuality, a cushion to keep men away. We were very wrong.

"She called herself a nymphomaniac. She said men loved her, but her body was all that they were interested in. She said that women believe what they see in magazines. "Most women," she said, "think the skinny model type is what men like to fuck. Oh this is far from the truth. Magazines are run by gay guys and super competitive women who can't get good jobs in any other major industry. Women like little butts, gay men do too. Gay men and power mad, conventional women see the male shape as the model of perfection in form. They choose it every time. They push it in their magazines. It's a twisted transvestitism. Heterosexual men want to touch flesh. They want thighs to squeeze, breasts they can sink into, pillows made in heaven, rear ends the size of a barn so even the lamest aimer can hit the bull's eye."

"She was something. For ages she was the only one standing up for guys.

"Lesbians," she said, "make me crazy. All this talk about phallo-centric this and that. And penetration! Oh, Wow! They'll tell you that penetration is violence. How can they make something fun sound so gross, like an enema? Penetration is violation, what crap! You might as well damn trees for standing up. Guys can't help it. Their rods are pumping all the time. Guys'll fuck animals, they'll screw each other, they'll fuck anything. They need to plug in, get an energy fix, and they pay for it. Here, have some swishy juicy life goo in exchange for the invisible grace of nature's soul sweetness."

"You can imagine the rest of us were constantly yelling at her, arguing with her, criticizing. She was a maniac. We all thought that she was buried in denial. We couldn't understand how the therapists could have put her with us, why they would subject us to this lunatic. She was obviously not ready for prime time sex abuse survivor group work. Most of this was said to her face and she'd just laugh, sometimes she'd fight back or argue.

"One argument went something like, "If you really think sex is good no matter what, "

"I didn't say that."

"I didn't finish."

"You misquoted me."

"Ok. Can I start again?"

"Sure. Be my guest."

"You say that we complain too much, right?"

"Yeah."

"You have said that sex is a natural act and we're being sissies, right?"

"Right."

"Well, I agree that there is a natural sexuality in people but I don't think that violence is a part of that. Violence can burst out in any area of life. When it happens in my sex life, it makes me frightened."

"That's what I mean about being a sissy. Why be frightened? No one threatens to kill you. They just hurt you a little. You're here. You want sex to be clean and tidy and neat and put it on the shelf in the bathroom next to your face creams, take it down only when you need it, or when you think you need it, which might be once a week, once a month, once a year, maybe never?"

"I think that you say these things on purpose to shock us. I feel shocked."

"I like sex and you don't."

"I like sex, I don't like to be hurt."

"Getting hurt is part of life. What you have to do is roll with the punches. Have you ever tried violence on purpose? Getting tied up can be fun. Tying someone else up is better. Slapping? Come on, open yourself up to the varieties of human experience."

"Everyone thought that the nurse would intervene. Nothing. The group leader said nothing."

"One of us said, 'Why did you go to therapy? Why are you here? If you're so well adjusted, so much better than the rest of us, able to deal with all the slings and arrows of your perverted sexuality, why did you come here?'"

"You could have heard a syringe drip. She moved her big body around in the molded plastic chair."

"I want to go to the bathroom now."

"I don't think that would be a wise choice," said the nurse.

"Do you think you can answer the question?" said our leader, "Do you feel ready to try?"

"Sure. No. I don't know."

"We watched her carefully. Maybe the nurse and the leader both knew her story. I couldn't tell. We waited. One of us started to cry.

"Why are you crying?"

"I'm sorry."

"Are you feeling sorry for me?"

"I'm not sorry for you. I'm just sorry, that's all."

"Don't feel sorry for me, I'm a drug addict, ok? Now are you satisfied? I got caught. I got mandatory therapy for a year. Or I go directly to jail, do not pass go, do not collect a hundred dollars."

"What drug?"

"Drugs."

"What drugs?"

"Cocaine, heroin, speed for weight control, poppers for fun, pot if nothing else is around. But I got caught with two hundred hits of acid."

"Silence."

"Oh, now, I'm a criminal, right? Everybody hates me."

"I don't hate you."

"Yeah, but you like everybody. You're Miss Nice 'n Kind."

"That was a mean thing to say."

"I'm a mean person."

The nurse intervened, "Would you like to tell us about your mother."

"What do you mean?"

"I think you know."

"I don't have to, do I?"

"No."

"But no one else said anything. She kept shifting her weight around. She adjusted her sweater, her skirt, "I don't have anything to say." She stared straight ahead. She scratched her arms. "Look, you guys, come on. Other people pass. I pass. Ok? I pass."

"We sat.

"She said, "I can play this game and win."

The group leader said, "No you can't."

I said, "I don't think it's a game. I don't think life is a game. I think winners and losers is a -"

"I don't care what you think. I don't care what anybody thinks. Ok, here it is, here is the story you've all been dying to hear. It's nothing. You'll be so disappointed. My mother killed herself. That's all."

"Was she mean to you?"

"Well, I'm sure all of you sissies would think so but she didn't know what she was doing. She was crazy."

"What did she do?"

"Well, she didn't rape me that's for sure."

"What did she do?"

"Oh, she locked me up a couple of times. In the basement, that's all. It was warm down there. She was punishing me for spilling something one time, another time I left something at school. She said I was going to learn my lesson and she pushed me down the basement stairs and it hurt but not too much and the basement wasn't cold or anything. I couldn't reach the light though, that was kind of hard. I don't like the dark. And I was hungry. But there was a lot of dirty laundry there, I made a bed and I sang myself songs and stuff, and the time went by pretty fast."

"How old were you?"

"How long were you down there?"

"Young. One time I was down there a couple of days but mostly not as long because she needed me to do things for her."

"Did she feed you when you were down there?"

"No."

"Where did you go to the bathroom?"

"God, what a stupid question. I went in the corner, in a pail. I didn't have to go much cause I didn't have anything to drink. I was skinny."

"How did your mother kill herself?"

"She shot herself after she set the house on fire. She cremated herself."

"Where were you?"

"I was there. Sleeping. A fireman came and got me but they couldn't find her. She probably didn't feel the burning up because she had a bullet in her head."

"Don't you hate her?"

"Not really."

"Where was your dad?"

"What?"

"So why are you in a sex abuse survivors' group?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

"It took a long time for her to loosen up with us. We got to work through our resentments. She was the sand in our oyster. With her denial as a foil, we were able to confront issues in a deeper way. Some of us felt freer to voice more ambiguous thoughts, feelings and opinions about sexuality in general and sexual abuse. We limped along. Nothing was ever completely worked through in one session. Never. And though this rate of working was at first thoroughly frustrating it helped because no one was seduced into thinking that these processes could be rushed. We moved, we were moving, we moved together at a snail's pace. We were naked snails to begin with. Snails who had lost their

shells. Snails who spent a lot of their time and energy pretending to have big spiky poisonous shells. We were snails who gradually revealed our sluggishness to each other. Then, as if by magic, real shells began to grow over our squishy parts, each shell unique, each shell a spiral of delicacy and great beauty, each shell a perfect fit, each shell reflecting and protecting our no longer naked selves.

"Boundaries are a big deal to people who have been physically invaded. Boundaries are a big deal because they have been made to seem meaningless. Or we might know that they're necessary but we might not know how to create or maintain them. Or we might only be able to make them so rigid that they keep shattering into fragments.

"Eventually she explained to us that her mother was a single parent deserted by her lover and thrown out as a slut by her own father who, we figured, had been severely abusive. She thought it likely that she was conceived as a result of a rape. She herself was raped by the neighborhood police officer her mother invited to hang out hoping he'd take a fancy to her daughter. Though this cop wore no ring and never spoke of it, he was, she found out later, married. His taste, in sex ran to underage nubile babes.

"Her first baby was born in a home for wayward girls run by her church. She was fourteen years old. She was not the youngest girl in the home. All the kids born there were adopted out. The mothers were not allowed to know anything about their children's whereabouts. Her first baby was a girl, 7lbs. 4oz., born on August 17th at 8:30 a.m.

"The neighborhood cop had a friend who owned an appliance store in town. He brought over a nice big tv for her mother to watch while he took her to hotel restaurants and taught her how to give blow jobs in the front seat of his Ford and go all the way when the moon was dark in the back seat of his Rambler. No one bothered telling her about contraceptives so, by the time she was sixteen, she'd had her second baby, a boy, born September 10th 9pm. 9 lbs even. This time the doctor told her to come back for birth control pills. She did.

"The tv donor had a friend and he had a friend too and her mother never liked working much, pimping was more her speed. With welfare providing food stamps, covering medical expenses and paying the rent, they were set up nicely. The car dealer man supplied a new car. The department store man provided clothes off the rack. It was amazing how many friends these guys had.

"She dropped out of school, she didn't have time for school, she had a full dance card. She liked various partners. She liked sex better now that she wasn't risking pregnancy. Her mother bugged her, but she had nowhere else to go. She didn't have family and her boyfriends only wanted to talk about happy things. No one told her that her mother was a drunk, that her doctor boyfriend was supplying her mother with feel good pills.

"When her mother died she thought she'd like to try and go to school but when she went to sign up for Adult Ed, the woman behind the desk said something under her breath about hopeless cases. She had a fit of pride and never went back.

"She liked to wear flashy clothes. She liked to be flashy period. She wanted to be famous but she didn't want to have to work at anything. She just wanted to be there. Sometimes she did sex dances in clubs, she'd masturbate, roll around and pose inside a glass encased circle while men watched and did whatever they did in the surrounding rent-a-cubicles. "Like in that Madonna video. People want to be movie stars but movie stars want to be me."

"She loved drugs. They made her feel more powerful than other people, for getting away with it, for being able to take it. She thought of herself as a sexual Rambo, a winner because she could tough it out and be victorious.

"The only regret she admitted to was that once, "some jerk " had given her a disease and she'd had to have a complete hysterectomy. "What a fuckhead. Men do that all the time, take what they want and let us pay for it. I can dig you guys there."

"The only thing she felt was missing in her life, the only thing she reckoned she'd never felt was safe."