

CHAPTER EIGHT

ACCEPTIONS PROVE RULES

"Until my father died I was able to retain my romantic notions concerning men. Jack was crushed in an accident at work. He was a dock worker. A huge South American crate full of bananas broke and set off, I gather, a domino effect of enormous destructive capacity. By the time the chaos was contained there was considerable loss of life. My father wasn't dead but his leg was crushed and he would only let the surgeon take a portion of it. He couldn't face losing the whole leg. He was vain. My mother and Justina brought him home. We watched as his blood turned against him. He died, in what could ~~be~~ fairly be called agony. It did nothing for his humanity. It didn't even improve his character.

"Women came from all over the neighborhood to bring us food. I met half brothers and sisters by the score. I was amazed. I took off from work for a few weeks to help my mother. Justina was working in the office of a big shot old time street Democrat, she seemed suited to play the second to strong characters. Life at my parents' house now included television. My father spent his last days watching television, making demands and hating us profoundly. It was as if his mask was peeling off, burned away by the napalm-like pain. All his energy was obliged to keep him alive, there was none left for dissembling any semblance of happiness, for dissembling reality.

"He came apart. He told me, in very clear terms, of the hate, the distaste, he had for women. It is so like the phrases and terms you hear when people talk about Blacks, The Irish, Communists or Faggots, as if one portion of humanity could be held responsible every haunted act of wretched weakness and loathed impropriety.

"Women, for my father, were both Pandora and the contents of her box. "And," he said, "if those witches had real courage, they would keep their box closed." The pun was intended. He didn't smile. His life had been ruined by women. "Women run the world." Women made the rules but never had to keep them. "Women are liars." Women were insatiable, in everything. I saw that, in his eyes, women were this great pulsing mass of desire, an amoebal force of army ants eating everything in their path, devouring the world, annihilating men as if men were an inferior life form, corrupting the fragile individuality of every man, robbing him of dignity and all possibility of glory, urging him to merge into the undifferentiated mass. "Men are puppets." Life was the playing out of female desires for the amusement of women debauched by their absolute power over life, men and circumstances.

"It was a shock for me. I still thought that it might be an accident that there were no women piloting major American airline flights. I still thought that unity was the subtextual goal of all men and women, that fairy tale romantic oneness was a

desire equally enthralling to men and to women. Still flush with the exuberance of youth; my father's vision stunned me with its raw emptiness, it's despair, it's bitterness.

"At first I was loath to believe it so I tried it out, superimposed it, like a grid, on the behavior of the men I knew. Young and old, it fit. I was astounded. Major comprehension clicked into gear, a fateful sense descended over my life. My lover at the time, as I was railing away, bouncing off the walls in reaction to my father's latest diatribe, let me know that I was responsible for his sexual feelings towards me. Not only his sexual feelings, but his emotions, were caused by me. And, since he was unhappy and uncomfortable and I had all the control, I should fix it for him. If I didn't fix it, if I tried and failed, or if I refused to try, his unhappiness was all my fault, was the result of my selfishness. Clever.

"I had one of those blessed flashes. I saw in his logic an explanation for the world's degradations, poverty, pollution, the general social mess. Women can't get into positions of power because they can't see this. This is important stuff. Men escape responsibility for their actions because they do not perceive their actions deriving from themselves. Men's faults it is generally assumed and just as generally accepted, derive from the desires of women. Women carry the blame for the sins of the world, more than Jews, more like Jesus, women are dying for our sins, crucified in a brazen show of power over the punishable sins of mercy, inclusiveness, miracles and life.

"No one believed me. I tried everyone I knew. These were the days of ERA. People were canvassing in the streets. I thought I had discovered the key, the central truth to why we were going to remain unequal. After all, there is no logical reason for it, by then black people had been granted equality without once mentioning women. The idea of women's equality was enough to turn people purple with blustering spluttering rage. "Women and Jews run the world" is old news to women and Jews who have yet to derive some benefit from this much reported but never substantiated searingly false fact. The obvious corollary of this perpetuated nonsense would be that Jewish women run the world, well, they may run parts of Florida and certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn but beyond that - Not.

"I made an absolute fool of myself with my opinions. ERA was rejected. I knew it would be but I was crestfallen. Where was the great woman lawyer to argue our case? It's a good case. We have a solid argument. We are being denied legal equality on the basis of an imaginary inferred superiority. Surely this non-logic could be deconstructed. I've never heard a legitimate argument against legal equality. Nowadays what I hear people, no, I never hear men mention it, what I hear women say, is that we don't need it. But that argument is specious. If we don't need it, if we already have equality, then a law would be a mere rubber stamp, there would be no resistance to its passing.

"I can see the purpose of privilege earned, but I see no reason to pay for a government of the people unless it commits itself wholeheartedly to keeping the playing field open to all comers regardless of differentials. Differently abled people have realized the necessity of organizing themselves, and of being properly represented. They have learned to put aside mutual disdain and self-hate. They have redefined themselves inclusively and have negotiated their positive self-definition, if not completely into the mass consciousness, at least deeply into our laws. Hopefully, eventually mass consciousness will be inconvenienced to think in new ways. Differently abled folks are now people with tangible privileges (great parking spaces, decent jobs, recourse in the courts for base injustice and indecency, sidewalks re-done, ramps everywhere, push button doors) in the public realm, the realm paid for by the group, by the whole of us.

"The differently abled have created the model for the successful restitution of rights in a democracy. Everything they achieved has been without bloodshed. That cannot be said of any other movement for equal rights in the modern world, including Gandhi's high profile experiments. The hard question is whether women have enough real humility, clear sight, and self-understanding to admit their real vulnerabilities and make them the basis for the bid for equal representation.

"You can't fight a peaceful fight. Fights are, by definition, contentious. But you can demand the right to negotiate as equals. You can call the bastards to meet their own stated aims. American black people won on the basis that they could not be equal unless made so by law. In the eyes of the culture in which they lived, they had an obvious, visible handicap, the color of their skin. They were, and are immediately identifiable as different, therefore, differently able and, according to the rules of the game called democracy, they can be different and still be equal, but only if the law recognizes this specifically, because the small minded have negative imaginations, viz my father, who never read a book but had volumes of misperceptions in his head equal to any Stephen King.

"I was pissed off. I was in jail and my sentence was based on total, unremitting bullshit. I was in this jail with fucking millions of other women and we did nothing because we couldn't take in the gravity of our situation. Our blindness condemned us to hate each other or hate men and confuse our children because we lacked the strength to confront the jail, the mind set, and the jailer, ourselves.

"I loved my father.

"It was pain full to watch him disintegrate, pain full to watch his Spartan fox hate, clutched tightly under his coat, held close to his heart, eat him alive. He craved his hate. This was his Faustian contract. This was his devil. He succumbed to the grand temptation, the succubus hate. His family were witness to his

madness, his grief, his life potential pestilent. He remained unyielding til his last breath escaped from the battleground."

Perceptions
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