

CHAPTER FOUR

STALACTITES AND DROMEDARIES

She was hard to get used to at first. She spoke explicitly about things that I am barely comfortable speaking about poetically, I had a recurring tendency to turn her coarse in my mind. Her language, you see, was foreign to me. I was brought up to think that ladies mustn't speak that way. But there are plenty of things that nice ladies aren't supposed to do that I have done. She spoke to me unselfconsciously, giving me her story as an offering. I liked how she saw me. I was her idea of a fairy godmother. She gave me the role of wise woman in her transformation ritual from gamin to married lady. I was the watcher, the witness, the third eye. I was there to bless her marriage. She was giving herself away, giving over the lessons of virginity, celebrating and relinquishing.

You are the only man with whom I have had serious sexual relations. Secretly, I have wondered if I was, well, good. I might as well say it, I have wondered if I was sexy, really sexy, or just adequate. She was a blessing to me. It was a mutual thing, our conversation, a transferring of approbation and information. She was lovely, nothing grotesque about her. You would like her. She's strong and feminine. She speaks beautifully. I asked her if she was a writer. She said the most remarkable thing. She told me that she had made a vow a few years back, never to pick up a pen except to sign her name. Extraordinary, I know, but I came to understand her full meaning.

It made me feel sexy, listening to her, I felt my sex, not just the physical acts, but the purpose and the reason for the soul of my sexuality. I have always felt self-conscious about myself, as if I spoke a little louder than everyone else we knew, the women I mean. Certainly I was taller, and, after the children, more buxom. I seemed to have more energy, more drive, more life flowing through me, calling me to adventure, calling me to you.

How lucky to have lived in the tumult with someone equally powerful, to have enjoyed every minute. How fascinating to delve into the mysteries of our own lives, the layers beneath the obvious. I got what I wanted. I wanted everything. Words are funny, they hit the target somewhere in the yellow if you're lucky. But sometimes an event vectors a bullseye, throws calculations into the black, over the line, makes, what the kids used to call a Happening. My plane conversation was a Happening. The resonance united my life, forward and back, melds me. I was feeling old, lonely, before I left, as though I had outlived the achievement of my dreams.

I am not finished. There are things that we have yet to do. Let's do them when I get back. Let's refuse to settle down and limp through our days, become a muted background for the fantastic antics of our youngsters. Let's break new ground. My little friend shared her sight with me, graced me with my ability to recognize

myself, pleasures past, pleasures future, graced me with the awareness that led me to my work, the awareness that when I choose freedom, I can create my life according to values strictly personal, utterly universal. Oh, let's! Let's embrace the dawn of our old age and the crowning achievement of death well earned. We will not go gently. Why should we? We did not live gently. We must die the way we lived. Bring them on, the men in black hats, we'll meet them, at high noon, pistols drawn, habillons touts en blanches avec nos galoshes rouges, une vrai jardiniere, un veritable marin.

We were served champagne before take off. We lifted off gracefully. After the drinks were served, we were chatting, anticipating the sole. All the bitty lights came on, the captain's soniferous baritone forced itself through a haze of crackling static. "Please, fasten your seat belts, return your trays to an upright position." I was concerned for myself. The little I had consumed in the way of spirits raced to my heart, phalanxes of oxygen deserted my brain. I felt decidedly vague. Jacqui tried to get me to talk. I knew what she was doing but I was unable to aid her aiding. I was drifting. I closed my eyes. I saw your face. You were in the garden, your white hair sun drenched, an angel behind my closed eyes, smiling in the garden. Beyond you were the girls, exactly as they had been at Josh's tenth birthday party, wearing the dresses your sister made them, the ones with the three layers of petticoats, the thick satin ribbons winding around their waists, they are arguing about who should get which color croquet mallet, you're laughing, calling for me to come and see. The eras were all mixed up, beautifully combined.

Then the plane did the most extraordinary thing, something I shall never forget, not in all my days to come. It lifted all-of-a-piece and then dropped. As if there was a God. A God-sized hand, reached out of heaven, a spoiled child, picked us up and, losing interest, immediately, dropped us.

This is probably familiar to you, the personalities and mischiefs of the wind. But I was overcome. My life takes place on a small scale physically. I flatter myself that I have a beneficial affect on the world around me but my concerns tend to be the little worlds that people make, homes, families, food. I forget, I admit, I do forget, how enormous are the hands of God.

When we dropped, Jacqui took my hand calmly and held it inside both of hers. I closed my eyes again, my head leaning back on the head rest, my neck sweaty, and watched you watching me. The plane continued to bump about, shimmying now and then. I saw the wind, set free above the expanse of ocean. Freed from trees and mountains, let loose to play and eddy, to prevail. And we, as if walking in the woods, had strayed into an area a tribe of mosquitoes had made their own. La, all on an instant, the air goes chaotic. One feels so righteous and indignant. The little bugs try to hurt us, to force us out of their territory. Force of numbers and a bit of *I was here first*, they generally win, we leave them in peace. Clearly our captain had stumbled into an area the wind had made his own. We

had been told, in no uncertain terms, to leave. The captain understood this as you would have, had you been captaining my air ship that night. The flight passed without further aerobic incident. We were served our sole. But not before I had treated myself to a very strong, double, Bloody Mary.

Jacqui said she loved speed. In everything. She said it didn't even bother her in sex. As long as a man was willing and interested in going for it a few more times, *quickies*, she called them, were alright with her. In fact, with quickies one could expand the locations appropriate for copulation. Elevators boggled my mind. I could not figure out how one could manage that, even after she had explained it to me twice. Bathroom logistics were easier for me to comprehend I did quite laugh when she told me about making love in the ladies bathroom in the basement of a coffee house while some poor woman wanting to use the toilet banged desperately on the door. The noise cost Jacqui and her beau their concentration, which put off the finish which made the lady bang louder, which made Jacqui's conundrum more difficult. Finally Jacqui was able to talk her beau into and through his ejaculation in a whisper while calming the woman in a yell.

There was a concert going on upstairs in the coffee house. The woman had drunk too much, she wanted to be sick. I roared, even though I felt a bit cruel. Then there was the problem of how to get out of the bathroom without facing the woman a deux. Jacqui yelled to the woman that she ought to try the men's room since these were the sort of toilet rooms wherein only one person (or groups of friends, or relatives, or lovers) could relieve themselves at a time. Jacqui advised the woman to throw up in the adjacent water closet. Choking on my cackles, I managed to ask Jacqui what excuse she gave the woman about what she could possibly be doing in there all that time. "Various things," was her reply. "What sort, of various, things?" I spluttered. The previous scare, and the several drinks before the sole had made me giddy. First she told the woman that she was peeing, then she was changing her pad, then she was washing out some blood that had gotten on her blouse, then she was searching for her IUD. "Maybe it's in the toilet. Has the string been sucked up into my cervix? Oh my God, I think my cervix is swelling!" What spirit, to track two separate simultaneous vaginal realities. Too amazing to believe.

Do you think she was kidding? That she was just trying to make me laugh? I thought then that it was all real, but now, telling you, I wonder if Jacqui was pulling my leg, since I had, according to her, gone so pale beforehand. I certainly was anything but pale after her telling.