

One avocado rolled out of the bag and bounced on to the floor. Another shopper, a woman, picked it up and returned it before I could even bend down. I felt a flush of embarrassment at the careful good-will of her gesture.

On my way to the cheese counter I remembered I'd wanted to buy a case of catfood. Well, too bad. I couldn't begin to pick up the wretched thing, and besides, where could I put it? Across the arms of the chair? The ache in my spine had expanded to a grinding pain. I was getting nauseous. Pain was eating me. Moment by moment I could feel my energy seeping away to a cold place where there was no colour, just jags and spires.

Jeanna was still ordering. "...and half a pound of cream cheese," I caught as I approached, "a pound of Stilton and half a pound of Gloucestershire." Her clear voice projected a long way. I smiled. She sounded just like our mother.

"Do you think this'll be enough?" Jeanna asked me seriously as I drew up beside her. I was taller than she was; it seemed strange to be looking up into her face.

"Enough?" I said, indicating the generous bulge of brown-wrapped parcels on the counter. "It looks great. I just hope everyone turns up, otherwise we'll be eating this stuff for weeks."

"That will be all, thank you," Jeanna said to the woman behind the counter. "No wonder people don't give parties more often," she whispered to me. "I can't believe how much this is all going to cost."

We had nearly reached the haven of the check-out counter when my sister said "Didn't you want some catfood?"

I wanted to groan. Visions of my apartment and lying down were brutally interrupted. Jeanna was so thoughtful. But she was right, Biscuit would go hungry if I said no. The Chinese store didn't carry any brands he'd eat.

"Thanks for reminding me," I said. The aisle where the catfood was stocked was on the far side of the store. I palmed another 222.

Finally, we escaped from Woodward's, feeling guilty and triumphant about the glorious supply of food we'd laid in. "Well, at the rate of one party every ten years, it's a bargain," Jeanna argued. "What's a hundred dollars? A mere nothing."

"We are splitting it," I muttered. I felt strangely distanced from events; the remorseless jarring of wheels over concrete, the fine drops of moisture which hazed the air. While we'd been shopping, mist had swirled in from the sea. It was chilly outside, raw. I shifted, trying to ease the clamour of my back. I might as well not have bothered.

By the blank wall of the Food Floor, Santa Claus, complete with half a dozen real reindeer took up residence every Christmas. Now, in the autumn, there was a man selling lottery tickets behind a table. It was not until Jeanna pushed me closer that I saw he too, was in a wheelchair. A grey blanket was over his knees and his head wobbled to one side as he studied something on the table.

I wanted to tell Jeanna to switch to the other side of the mall, but it was too late. Still, the man had his head down. Perhaps we could get by without him seeing us.

"Hey, Valerie, I just remembered something." My sister's voice floated effortlessly over the concourse.

The man looked up. He was about thirty, with fuzzy brown hair and thick eyebrows. For a moment his face was blank, then he noticed the wheelchair. "Hel-lo," he said. His voice was slurred.

Of course, it's like a car club, I thought. I should have known. I was supposed to acknowledge this guy - weren't we in the same sort of vehicle? "Hi," I said, and smiled.

The man really saw me then. We were almost opposite one another, separated by a distance of about three meters. He straightened as though he'd been pulled upward, and his eyes filled with blind warmth. I could see myself mirrored in his eyes: he looked as though he'd been searching for me all his life, as though he were my lover. Delight and incredulous wonder chased across his face. Weren't we the same, both crippled? The man's blue eyes locked fast on mine. The sudden, dreadful intimacy made me flinch. "Hel-lo," he said again.

Jeanna, confused by this interchange, slowed till we were almost stopped.

"Keep on," I hissed.

"How - are - you? the man asked. His head bobbed.

The chair began to move again. I smiled weakly. I couldn't think what else to do.

Past Mr. Robert's, we turned the corner and headed for the car. In the store windows, our reflections paced us: two women, one walking, one in a wheelchair.

## THE USE OF WOMEN

*A few years back, the wife of a Toronto rabbi declared that intermarriage between Jews and Christians was 'worse than Hitler.' Even so stupid an opinion has a grain of truth in it: minority cultures may thrive under persecution, then wither away when they achieve acceptance by the larger society. (Paul Delany, from "The Homosexual Factor," in Saturday Night, February 1981, p. 36)*

Good journalist, unprejudiced,  
sensitive to the needs of homosexual  
men, has sacrificed a woman,  
en passant, without  
noticing her, to rewrite her  
'grain of truth'  
logically, acceptably.

At cocktail parties and  
other sexual  
intersections,  
bottoms are not pinched but bright  
heads get pillaged for 'stupid' opinions  
to be  
revised into cogent  
comment by real thinkers.

They winnow away emotional chaff, language;  
they keep the grains of truth, logic.  
Everybody knows women see only outsides  
of things, superficially, never know whereof  
they speak so no credit  
need be given: none is due.

**Polly Fleck**  
Banff, Alberta