

The Alternative Route

Helen Lucas



L'accusee

Helen and her sister

Et si je n'étais pas castrée?
 Et si je n'étais pas frustrée?
 Et si je n'étais ni belle, ni douce, ni passive, ni féminine.
 Et si je n'étais pas en mal de virilité?
 Et si je n'étais pas à l'affût de l'amour-consommation-
 possession
 Et si je n'étais ni esclave, ni courtisane, ni femelle.
 Mais femme! Vivante, semblable à mille autres, unique
 pourtant.
 Femme! Avec les pieds solidement amorcés dans cette terre
 qu'ils ont bétonnée
 Sous ma mère la Lune-calendrier
 Je suis mains-cuisine-dactylo-lavage-couture-stylo-lotions-auto.
 Je suis Coeur inquiétude attente retours de bureau et d'école.
 Je suis tête-rêve et chansons guimauve
 Pour croire que mes neufs mois et mes veilles de jeunes années
 survivront à l'oeil
 mauve de cette mort-pollution
 Violence de feu et de soufre et tous ces atomes stupide-ment
 libérés
 Je suis chair-tiède qui se détend contre les chaleurs clinquantes
 des bureaux usines magasins de mes faux désirs.
 Tout cela, tout cela, c'est moi, femme qui l'ai fait?
 Je n'ai encore rien fait, puisque j'attends ma place officielle
 dans la société.
 Je n'ai rien fait, alors pourquoi m'accuser?

Nadia Ghalem

I knew I was in for trouble when I realized I could draw. It was 1958. Why would a happily married young woman with two small children and a lovely home want to become an artist? Who were the known women artists? The role models?

There were the Isadora Duncans, free, promiscuous, talented, but tragic. I could never see myself in the image of an Isadora Duncan. Who then?

To become what I felt I would eventually be, I had to leave where I was, who I was, and seek something new. Rebirth is not easy.

One major task was learning to deal with anger — anger directed at the background and the church which limit women's potential. It was also directed at the men in that background who know so well how to exploit women.

Then there was the aloneness — it too had to be dealt with. Both feelings became fuel for much of my work and the artist in me flourished.

I have a sister, fourteen months younger, who also married about the same time and had three children. She has never ever called herself a feminist. Over the years she has done many things to expand herself, but her days always began by seeing first to the needs of her family.

Whatever programming our parents instilled in us she adhered to admirably. Then one day this year, she announced she was going to seek a federal nomination in her riding. She had evidently been quietly preparing herself for it for many years.

At the nomination meeting she stood at the entrance of the auditorium confident and secure, greeting people. She won easily, on the first ballot.

I looked about amazed and deeply moved. A number of her supporters were from the ethnic communities. They'd eagerly come out to support her because they felt 'she was one of them'.

Men from our background who by my terms of reference put women down were waving her placards and cheering loudly. When she won they rushed up to shake her hand. At her side were her husband and her sons and her many friends.

A marvellous combined effort. No anger, no aloneness.

Two sisters — taking two different directions, choosing two totally opposite ways to seek fulfillment.

I looked at our realities. What I found suffocating she saw as supportive and nourishing. Both realities exist, both are valid. Yet when we embraced that evening we were kindred spirits and closer than we'd been for many years.

We knew we were both winners.

Helen Lucas
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