

SANDRA WOOLFREY

Between the Two of You

Head tilted slightly back and away from the camera, a pensive expression, looking older than your eighteen years you are on your honeymoon, you and this man have waited for this moment. You've left your family, youngest of six, your father's joy, now married life begins. You are about to move onto the farm of strangers. Your mother-in-law widowed, your husband, her eldest, became the family patriarch when he was only nineteen. You had not yet met him. Your sister-in-law proves a disappointment though you are bound by cigarettes you sneak and the mother-in-law's ways. Down on hands and knees scrubbing, your lower lip moving, you unleash your anger on the kitchen floor. Isolated from the neighbour women because you like to read and are a stranger to this county you are lonely for the company of your sisters, you talk to your daughter though she's only a child. Sundays there are drives in the country, ice cream, picnics with neighbours in summer when the children are small. A welcome swim, in your bathing suits, bodies open to the sun, the breeze, the sand, your hearts half open to each other. They confide their husbands have never seen them naked. You don't believe them. You enjoy your body, long to run naked. There is no shame. This man who waited for you comes to you in the night with hands that can calm horses and you are happy together. On a hot day he ties the team to the gatepost and comes into the house for a drink of cold water, takes time to cup your breast, kiss your lips.

You go back to peeling potatoes with the knowledge that between you things are good. You hate the scrubboard, the diapers, the heat of the stove in summer as you can the fish, the fruit, the vegetables that appear with more speed than you can boil water. In fall you and your sister-in-law pick tomatoes and corn with the men. There is a slow uneven banter between you. You take turns drinking from the big thermos of cold water. At noon a picnic lunch on a trestle table. The air crisp. On winter nights you read your daughters stories of Sammy Jay, Peter Rabbit and Jimmy Coon. And in spring before the tomatoes have to be planted you spend afternoons with a library book, so deep in Africa you don't hear your children call to you or smell the potatoes scorching as the spring light enters the window and falls on the walls and floors that were the objects of your spring cleaning. In November the men go deer hunting and time takes another pace. You and your sister-in-law sit by the Quebec heater, laughing, cracking hickory nuts, eating fudge, making jokes about the hired man, the children playing around the edges sensing your high spirits. At night when the children are asleep and his body isn't there to turn toward, you think about the day the men will come home exhilarated, hounds tired, with stories to tell of practical jokes, lost dogs, deer they shot, deer they missed, the fun they had in that cabin in the woods while the first snow fell and the nights froze hard and you read copies of Redbook that your sister lent you and missed him stoking up the stove

early in the morning on his way to do the chores so the kitchen would be warm when you came down to cook breakfast, missed the sound of his hand twisting the lid of the cookie jar before he slips quietly from the house into the chill freshness of the morning to be greeted by the sweet warm breath of his cows, the nicker of horses as he forks hay down from the mow, fills their mangers. This is the man's place you know only through the washing of pails and cream separator parts, you don't know the feel of warm teats, the slippery embryonic sac. The sound of milk chinging into the pail, a sound you learned in childhood just as your children learn it now while their father does the evening chores and you are busy getting on supper. The day comes to a close, the man helps them with their spelling while you take your time with the dishes, put the children to bed in their sleepers, tuck in hot flatirons wrapped in newspaper to take the chill off the bed and warm their feet just as your mother had done and then you come back to the warmth of the kitchen where the man sits in a rocking chair and what you do or say then your children cannot know in this quiet time in the warm kitchen when the two of you are alone. Sometimes you play cards with a neighbour couple. The men always play against the women, the competition between the sexes battled out with laughter and smart remarks, hearts and clubs, until you or whoever is hostess serves coffee and little

cakes, something you have baked and the four of you relax at last and a man warms up an old Ford, one couple pits car against snow, the other checks the fire and goes to bed. And he turns to you, makes some teasing remark about your prowess at cards to which you respond hotly and he enters you and it is good between you. The summer sun turns your body nutbrown and penetrates his old white shirt you wear to pick berries, leaving white patterns where it cannot reach. In the late afternoon you stretch out barefoot under the maple tree, rest your back, touch the earth, green grass between your fingers, eyes closed to the dappled sun. He loads crates of berries onto the truck, you hear the shuffle of berry boxes, one of your daughters goes to fetch the cows, soon you will hear the soft putting of the milking machine and you will stretch, walk to the house, wash away the berry stains and the smell the summer sun has left on your skin, cook supper. Maybe tonight you'll make a berry pudding. There are yellow beans you can warm from dinner. You wash the dishes while he mends a bit of electric fence. Your daughters disappear on bikes down the lane. Tonight you ride to the cannery with him, stop to visit the owner and his wife. On the way home you drive through the crossroad, he remarks the tomato and corn crops. You watch swallows dip, sunlight glinting blue and orange, the light warm, the air still.

In the night you waken
with the soft roll of thunder,
the rain you have both been
hoping for patters on the dry
earth. He gets up, closes
the west window, kisses you
softly and you both turn,
fall back to sleep.
You used to want to clerk
in a store when money
was tight. You enjoyed
clerking for a few months
before you were married,
enjoyed meeting people. But he
didn't want you to so you
stayed on the farm like
other farm wives. One
summer the two of you
took the girls to Huyk's Point
in the evenings and brought
home truckloads of flat rocks,
built a barbecue and a
rockgarden in which you
planted chives, moss pinks,
stonecrop and portulaca.
You bought a picnic
table. It was a good
summer for the two of
you. Some summer
evenings you fish for
perch or drive to a beach
where you swim with the girls.
He stays on the shore, enjoys
the cool shade of a big
willow tree, skips rocks
for the girls, for his boyhood,
for the pleasure of
seeing them skip,
seven times,
eight times,
over the still July surface,
you up to your breasts
in water, watching the girls,
the one dogpaddling toward you,
the smaller one splashing nearer shore.
Weekends you visit your
parents' cottage, the girls fish
off the dock, you talk to your
mother, the men go to look
at the young cattle,
around the table your

father's laugh, your
mother's mirth,
they are both fond of him
and in many ways the two
of you are like them.
On the way home your
voices a soft murmur, the
long wait at the ferry,
the girls tired.
There are nights when he
goes to the salebarn.
You wait up for him,
reading or mending, nodding
off in the rocking chair,
until he comes home
late, weary, a hundred
dollars for the heifer, and you
tumble into bed together.
In the morning you'll plant
tomatoes if it doesn't rain,
walk behind the setter
and fill in any
space in a row that's
been missed, one of
the girls once calculated
how many miles their
father walked in a week
cultivating, you walked
miles yourself those
days. Your mother-in-law
helped out, took care of
the children, cooked two
dinners, one for the family
in her house, one for your
house. She is good
that way. Life isn't
the way you had
dreamed it would be
when you were young
and read pocket novels.
You work hard, you don't
have fancy clothes, don't
even need them really,
just one good summer dress
and one good winter dress
for some do or other,
a cardparty maybe.
The women in the village
work in the canning
factory, carry on,
have stories to tell,

you miss the camaraderie
 you have when you are
 with your sisters
 but when you look around
 there aren't many women,
 none you know of really,
 who has a man as good
 as you do, and it is
 good between the two of you,
 evenings, mealtimes, Sundays,
 when you leave your work and you
 turn towards each other.

Sandra Woolfrey is the Director of wlu Press and an artist. She has won the Dorothy Shoemaker Literary Award for Poetry (1990) and has been short-listed for the CBC Poetry Contest (1991 and 1992).



Deidre Scherer, "Reading," fabric and thread, 25" x 20", January 1993

Photo: Jeff Baird

GRADUATE COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM IN

---- *Women's Studies* ----

Graduate departments and Centres within the University of Toronto have pooled their resources to form the new Graduate Collaborative Program in Women's Studies. Applications will be considered for the following degree programs:

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Community Health	Msc, MHS, PhD
Comparative Literature	MA, PhD
Criminology	MA, PhD
Drama	MA, PhD
Education	MA, Med, PhD, EdD
English	MA, PhD
French	MA, PhD
History	MA, PhD
Law	LLM, SJD
Near Eastern Studies	MA, PhilM, PhD
Philosophy	MA, PhD
Political Science	MA, PhD
Religion	MA, PhD
Social Work	MSW, MSW/LLB, PhD
Sociology	MA, PhD
Spanish & Portuguese	MA, PhD

Admission Requirements:

In addition to the admissions criteria of the graduate unit through which they wish to enroll, applicants must display a suitable familiarity with approaches and methodologies associated with scholarship in Women's Studies.

Program Requirements:

Students must apply to and register in one of the participating units, and follow a course of study acceptable to both the graduate unit and the Graduate Collaborative Program in Women's Studies. Upon successful completion of the requirements students receive, in addition to the master's or doctoral degree from the graduate unit, the notation "Completed Graduate Collaborative Program in Women's Studies" on their transcripts.

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