

thought if not overly sentimental to think that someone so understands what a precious exchange love is, that if it were lacking, they would feel obliged to try very hard in other ways to make up for it.

I just had a thought. Marriages are breaking up like crazy these days. There was a certain sector of the movement at

one time that encouraged women to break the chains of that oppressive union because love between men and women was impossible. Wouldn't it be ironic if, among those women now leaving their marriages, it turned out to be because they now saw love as possible, not impossible, and they decided to go out after it?

Letter to a Lover When She Left Him

This morning on the phone I was still into apologizing for my own existence and needs as a human being. I told you "even if our whole relationship failed I want you to know you can still be proud of getting me to come back to Missouri." You said, startled, something to the effect of "huh? What happened to our relationship?" *You didn't even know what had happened in your own life!* You had to go, but said you really wanted to know what I was talking about. Perhaps if we had some chance of seeing each other on a regular basis instead of weekends every few months, I might think differently about trying to tell you what happened to *us* and that includes *you*. Right now I just feel like writing it for the *record* because the very same reasons which make it almost ludicrous that I should try to explain *anything* to *you*. You told me yourself that you are like a Scandinavian, i.e. unable to express your feelings, and also that the way you survived your mother was by ignoring her (Idid manage to tell you that I know well that you had to do that and that you must have paid a terrible price in order to function in terms of thereby being cut off from your feelings about women and the threat that they may or may not pose to you). And so how can I reach you if I try to explain? All the way home on the plane I heard you saying on the phone this morning that you were touched by my weeping on the way to the airport. When I think of that, sometimes I blame myself for not having tried harder to communicate with you when we were together, but then I remember that every time we parted I've said to myself "leave it there, stop breaking your heart over him" and *as soon as I've gone* you've suddenly started missing me. I made the mistake of being moved by that when I really fundamentally *resent* that kind of medieval love. (And

now can only recall in pain the time I told you that only once had I felt you knew you wanted me and I was there: five minutes before we left—"hit and run" I called it, bravely.) It also means that you can miss a convenient image of me, not a full person; that person who seems "out of control" to you whether in joy or in "trauma". Someday I wonder if you'll hear how and when you use that phrase "out of control". It reminds me of that (c)old use of the phrase "keeping one's cool". Sometimes I want to burst and say to you, "What the hell are you saving your feelings for, the next life?" Even your phrase "stay loved" surprised me when it turned out that it was your way of saying "I love you," the passive voice, and the imperative for me to do all the work! Where *are you*?

I'm especially horrified at what this weekend says about my continued vulnerability. One month ago I could tell you that you were the most liberated man I know, because you told me that your goal in life was to learn to love and be loved. And yet, here I was in the past few days going through incredible mental and physical gyrations apologizing to you for me, and to me for you. I am sick that I almost fell into the trap of calling myself neurotic, a bottomless pit of need for affection, ugly, unlovable, naggish, insecure, cry-baby, when essentially what I am is a person who had gone to meet her lover with the expectation and the need to be received as given: I wanted you, I realize now, to act like I felt and acted about you—thrilled to see you and to be with you, and, *yes!* wanting to make love every time we came to a beautiful place on the river. I remember going on a logic trip. "Why," I said to myself, "isn't he moved by where we are, by being able to share with me the joys of his childhood. I just can't see why any sane man could stand here with a beautiful and bright woman who loves him and not simply yearn to make love with her, as I do with him." Soon even my logic fell apart, and I no longer felt beautiful, or even bright, and thought that it wasn't you, but that *I* was the kind of person you were treating me *as if* I were. Either not visible, not worth

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paying attention to the needs of, OR LEARNING TO IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW; or if visible, then necessarily *to be rejected*. I say rejected because I well remember how disdainful you are about how terrible a person can feel about herself if rejected when offering love; you screamed, you keep telling me, at the paper I wrote about it in 1960. Frieda Fromm-Reichman's only definition of schizophrenia is that that's what happens to someone who simply can't dare to offer his/her love again. You teased me about not talking in my usual frank, open, self-respecting way at your friend's house in Chicago; "I've never heard you stumble over *those* words (intimate ones) like that before," and I answered you, "I'm operating in a condition of stress." It had become true that whether I was magnificent or felt ugly you *had* to lock me out. I also told you this weekend that it was outrageous for men to be condescending about women's needs for approval, that surely all human beings need approval from the human beings they care about, the difference being that men get so much *a priori* that they don't even see it and women still have to beg. I asked you, "Haven't you ever made a pass at a woman and been turned down and felt terrible?" You looked at me uncomprehendingly. I don't know if it was because no one had ever turned you down, or that you and the entire society have built institutions and psychological mechanisms for you to handle such rejection; whether it be pop music, the bar scene or just the general support for that feeling of smug superiority so easily available to men so that many of the decent ones, very much including you, don't even have to bother with the smugness or outside support. (While I want to die just to stop the pain). The paradox of it all is that I could still sit here incredulously, saying: "All I wanted was for you to love me and for you to let me love you." The irony of it is that I am realizing what a revolutionary want that "all" is. You didn't understand when I moaned, "Oh, Women's Liberation has such a long way to go" when you told me about being disassociated from your emotions. "What does that have to do with women's liberation?" you asked—forgetting that you had *intellectually* understood enough to tell me *yourself* last month, "Whatever Women's Liberation is, it obviously reaches *closest to home* because of the defensiveness of Harriet," and you liked Julius Lester's "men should be overjoyed, not threatened by WL because their humanity depends on it."

But when it comes to your own *gut*—you, with all the ease in the world, can stare blindly or say, "huh?" The whole society will support you! If you throw it back on me, "You just want to make love more times than I do," it's like a store clerk telling me, "We've never had any complaints before" and I'm lost if I don't have a consumer's union or Nader's Raiders to blow the lid off that defense.

But to throw it back on you is like water off a duck's back.

What can I explain to you that you would hear? You'd have to *need* to hear me more than all your needs *not* to (by which you survive now). I don't know *how* you'll recognize that need. I asked you once: "Don't you need somebody to love?"—and you leapt away—"Oh, no, I love you, I want you, but I don't need you." What colossal

arrogance—what inhumanity to women—and what self-destruction! It was also revealing because I had not said need me—but *need to love me*.

Easily the most brilliant and warmest person I know is a woman who still, in spite of the fact that she's the world's best psychiatrist (I say), is embarrassed by her anger at her husband's (also a brilliant, loving person) ignoring her even on *mutual* plans. She once went without him, came home afterwards mumbling, and he called out "I'm ready to go now, dear!" That description left a profound effect on me. Recently she was looking over brochures for trips this summer. "Wouldn't it be nice to go to Europe?" "Europe!" he said. "I thought I told you we were going to the conference in Colorado Springs the 21st." "Told me," she said, (laughing, my god!, as she told me) "you didn't even *ask* me! and I work 'til the 26th." So he said, "don't come til the 5th anyway, as I'll be working all the time anyway". . . So on the 26th he calls — "come now, I have no one to play with!" She, of course, couldn't as she had commitments to her mother and to work on *their* house. So she went on the fifth, but she tells me *laughing* and defending him, "Men are like the economists say. They wouldn't dare admit beforehand they might need you, so they don't dare invite you because they *might* get tied up with work, and then feel guilty." (I pointed out that was *also* disrespectful of her, because, if he's tied up, she's *very* capable of taking care of herself (shock!)).

Lastly, she related to me, that at the end of the summer before she went back to work, her husband was totally shook because he called and called the house, and she wasn't there. She told me she had answered him, "But you know, you told me you *wouldn't be needing me* today, so I went off with some friends." He was simply so used to having her here (she works at home) that again he was shook when she wasn't; but *worst of all* is this kind of taking inventory of everybody else's *needs of you*, and only then allowing yourself to get off on your own.

Speaking of psychiatrists, a friend of mine just recalled that when a man had said that "he wasn't good enough for her because he had no emotions, as she did"—that it had driven her to a psychiatrist because she *doubted* her own good sense that we all have emotions, but just relate to them differently. The important thing here is that all the defenses work in his favor to keep him from doing anything about his hangups. But since women are trained to please men, we always think we've failed if we can't reach them and we go to psychiatrists because we desperately want to please and to understand. But nobody has ever told a man that he's on earth to please a woman. (Even the "serve the people" rhetoric of "the movement" didn't mean women, until we reminded them.) A woman recently explained it as a "conflict of interest." After waiting for a long period of time for her lover to caress her in the way best for her (so that she could tell him "more of that, please") he started screaming "Stop being a traffic cop—and telling me what to do." The horror of it is that she spent months thinking up the right way of telling him, for example, waiting until he did something right so she wouldn't have to hurt him by saying, "please don't do this or that" (in the *meantime* he *wonders* why she nags!) The "conflict of interest" means that he was interested in his own sexual

enjoyment and also in *her* sexual enjoyment for *himself*. When she mentioned her own sexual enjoyment for herself the conflict arose. One man recently leapt out of bed screaming that she was trying to make a slave out of him and then to kill him. The tragedy in that situation was that they had been able to talk and had been acting as if they were there for mutual pleasure all along. But she had begun to learn to define her own bodily needs and his stumbling around was driving her crazy, so she moved his hand where she needed it. What had been a simple gesture in honor of her own humanity—he turned into a dominance trip. And yet, something tells me that it's *also* more respectful of *you* as people if we don't contribute to that tyranny any longer. (But it somehow still enrages me that the people who are oppressed have to do all the fighting for their own liberation, for their own human rights which they should have *a priori*.) On an intimate level, it is important to remember that women as an oppressed group are the only ones whose entire physical and emotional life is tied to their "master race." Who else would worry about hurting the fragile egos of their oppressors? Who else would try to love them at the same time? Who else would feel guilty as I did when I cried on the way to the airport? (that you were going off to a difficult day's work and there I was crying!)

If you ever ask me why I've left you, I could only refer you to Carl Dreyer's masterpiece, "Gertrude" (Danish film). Every single word in it is what I would say. This famous poet sees her in later years and asks her "Why did you leave me?" and she tells him that *he* had left *her* because his ambition for glory as a national lyric poet (!) had meant more to him than she did. What she wanted was to be loved completely just as she loved (meanwhile she was absolutely brilliant and a famous classical singer. It was not the "love" of someone who did not respect herself, but of a full person). At the end of the film she says that she wants as her epitaph her poem, written when she was sixteen: the refrain of it was "But I have loved." The usual male reaction to this film is a violent attack on her for having too much pride.

A man (professor) just said to me this week "Marlene, that poor thing. I guess she wasn't very pretty." On the one hand those of us who have made it in various styles of beauty, sexiness and brains know that nothing budes the natural ease of men to lock us out of their hearts *and* any real effect in the decisions which determine our lives; so we might as well feel attractive to ourselves because we're ugly to them *no matter what*. On the other hand, Marlene is really beautiful because she's living a meaningful, motivated life and she's so much her warm, brilliant self at all times that it makes *you* feel great to be alive, struggling!

I recently read that one of Napoleon's generals so irritated a lady of the court with his arrogance that she asked him, "Tell me sir, if you are like this, how do you make love?"—"I don't make love: it's delivered to me ready-made," he answered. No, I thought, the joy's in the struggle, in the creating; not in the winning, and not in the power even that some men now say they have: "When my girl comes in rapid-fire machine gun succession, I feel so great to have that power," It's not just our names that are not ours, even our orgasms (when possible) are not our own.

The ache of it all is that I can see my way clear enough to write this down only when I've realized it makes no sense to try to love you any more. But I couldn't have *made* you *want* to think and act differently about what we're about in life and in bed; so to say to myself "if I'd only told him when we were together" is a futile "if" as long as you don't want to need to reach through your barrier. I was also already degrading myself way beyond any self-respecting limits every time I asked you to kiss me. If it's gone that far, what is there to say?

Yet many have said to me "You just need a good man (Mr. Fixit), try again," or "It's all in your head, all in how you think about yourself." "Oppression doesn't exist." Thanks to Women's Liberation, I don't have to believe either *hoax* any more; at least I'm not alone in knowing that some very real changes have got to come, even if we're not sure how yet. I still have a real need to love and be loved. And that's what makes me alive.

Am I so terribly
aggressive,
that you could not
love me?

Have I come on so
strong, because I care too much,
that you can never
love me?

Did I make you so nervous
by telling you my secrets,
that you will never
love me?

Am I so unlike what a young girl should be,
that you shall never want to
love me?

Have I so far
missed your heart,
that you will never try to
love me?

Am I so terribly
hurt,
that I could never
love you?

— Langdon Faust
Sacramento, California
MUTHAH, 1970