

Roots

a radical feminist zine

Getting to know each other

Summer 2023 issue

Samizdat



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Cover image: Becky Regins' Grandma's dowry blanket.
Roots illustration by Gordon Johnson from Pixabay.

Editor's foreword

By Becky Regins

It was a dark evening of December 20, 2022. I was getting my daily dose of dread reading the news on feminist sites and discussions about them on feminist social media. The world is going under, I was sure. And we were the only ones seeing what was happening, how, and why, and yet completely misunderstood, vilified, ignored, and hated by the mainstream line of thought. There is no point in screaming in a closed dark room where the only people who can hear you are also in the same dark room, screaming.

We have to get our message out, somehow. The digital world is ruled by men and therefore is hostile – so many women are banned and deplatformed for simply speaking their mind – and it often feels like we're talking to a wall. Probably because we are. A wall of ignorance, a wall of wanting to *appear* a good person instead of *being* a good person, a wall dividing the history into "Right side" and "Wrong side". But the real world is different. In the real, physical world, you can't just mute or block your classmates, co-workers, people on the street or public transport, no matter how much you dislike them. In the real world, you pick up the newspaper you'd otherwise never read, just because someone left it in on a bus seat. You take a pamphlet from an activist on the street and take a short glance at it before throwing it away, and sometimes you read it all.

And I am very certain that there are many women who look at what's happening, what ideas are being sold, and feel a deep discomfort about it all. They should just be kind? They should just accept without trying to understand? And so they walk silently with doubts in their hearts, not having anyone to talk to, because surely there's something wrong with them?

No.

We have to talk. We have to express our beliefs. We have to discuss, analyse, and confront what we feel in our hearts is wrong.

We are not alone.

We are many – but separated from each other by the invisible wall of never stopping propaganda about how surely no good people think like us.

This zine, available in digital formats, and also as a printable PDF, aims to connect us wherever in the world we might find us. Energize us. Organize us. Make us matter. Make us loud and impossible to ignore.

Please Roots-roll strangers on the Internet. Print as many copies of the zine as you can and forget them on benches, coffee tables, cinema seats, taxis, bike baskets. Every time someone reads this zine, a seed is planted, and with time, it will form roots, grow, and bloom.

See you in the real world!

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In the next issue

Essay: Looking For Sexism by Dr Dee

Dr Dee is a woman in her 50s from the UK. She works in STEM.

People like to proclaim that compared to a generation ago we live in a much less sexist culture, and in many ways this is clearly true. The law does not permit job advertisements to identify a single sex without a specific reason, women are no longer barred from any type of education, training and qualification we are capable of earning, and women occasionally occupy positions that were once occupied exclusively by men. But, like many thoughtful women, I have some reservations about this complacency. Study after study continues to demonstrate that girls and women are still often shortchanged compared to men, and the more aware we become of the limitations we face, the more pervasive we realise they are. Here are three stories from my own life.

I was listening to a professor explain a problem in calculus class. ‘Imagine you’re walking through the woods,’ he said, ‘and you see a naked woman. You want to get to her, but you can’t because....’ I have no idea now what problem he was attempting to explain, because that image freaked me right the hell out; it was pretty clear to me that the subject of his story didn’t want to get to the naked woman to provide her with tea and a blanket. I was so disturbed by this image that I had nightmares about being naked in the woods with men all around wanting to ‘get to’ me. Who can tell how much the cumulative effects of such casually misogynistic turns of phrase have contributed to keeping me and other women from being as enthusiastic about or successful at math as we otherwise might have been?

I was sitting in a safety training class for engineers working on live rail lines. ‘The average human stride is a meter’, the instructor stated. I’m the average height for a woman, and have long strides for my height, and I know my stride is substantially less than a meter. I spoke to the instructor during the break, telling him that most of us don’t have much of a problem with silly jokes about ‘multitasking’ or whatever, but I was deeply offended that he seemed to think that the ‘average human’ was a male. Two women were sitting right in front of him as he spoke in class, and he in effect told us we didn’t count as human. Can we trust a man who categorises humans into ‘humans’ and ‘women’ to think of female people as people just like him when he’s interacting with us, in the most trivial to the most serious situations?

I was lying in bed listening to Radiolab, a radio show known for the rich soundscapes that pull the listener into the story. ‘Imagine you’re a monkey’, one of the narrators says, and I duly closed my eyes and did so. ‘Imagine you’re swinging from tree to tree, grabbing fruit and taking bites, when all of a sudden you see...a lady monkey!’ I’m immediately jerked out of my self-induced trance. Wait a minute, were we told to imagine ourselves as male monkeys? I wrote to Radiolab to let them know that my disorientation at this sudden random insertion of the monkey’s sex kept me from following the rest of the story, and that I was now using ‘ladymonkey’ as a code word for

unconscious sexism. This particular incident obviously didn't have any serious consequences, but what if focus and attention had been necessary for my success in some endeavour that mattered to me?

None of these examples is particularly earthshaking or emotionally damaging; none could be considered discriminatory, and there was certainly no conscious intent on the part of the men in question to harm me personally or women in general. Yet these kinds of daily interactions have the effect of keeping us off balance, out of synch, off our game, and can cumulatively make the difference between success and failure, achievement and discouragement, particularly in highly competitive environments or where our best efforts and skills are required to succeed.

It could be argued that in a way it's worse to live in a culture where overt sexism is frowned on, as women who are taught that sexism doesn't exist don't become aware enough of these kinds of demeaning and othering behaviours to challenge them, even if only in our own heads. If we're not made aware that we aren't receiving the same kind of encouragement and support that men are, or that we're consistently ignored or overlooked, we assume that these limitations are true for everyone, not realising the advantages men customarily receive...or worse, we believe we personally don't deserve or haven't earned the advantages that men routinely get.

Fiction: Silence Rules by Seraphim Isper

Seraphim Isper is an eldritch Horror who morphs the mortal mind to Soup upon being Glimpsed. There is little documented about her true nature.

I lean over the toilet, ejecting my eggplant casserole; some gets caught in my hair.

"Jane, are you alright?" Mother pounds on the door.

I spit out what I can.

"I'm fine." I made it to the toilet in time, at least.

Mother is silent for a moment.

"Okay. Love you, honey."

"Love you, too... Could I have some privacy please?"

"Of course. Your father and I are just finishing dinner."

"Okay."

I manage to hold the vomit in my mouth until I hear her go down the stairs. I'm not sure why I thought to use the upstairs bathroom instead of the one by the main floor, but I had a feeling it would have been a bad idea.

Maybe I'm pregnant.

Hahaha... Wait.

After a stressful few seconds spent washing my mouth and hair out, I slowly tiptoe down the stairs.

"Thought you loved eggplant casserole." My father says, sternly. Then again, he says everything sternly.

He looks at me like he knows I've done something wrong. I know by now that that's just the expression reserved for looking at me, and that he doesn't know shit.

"Doesn't change the need to use the bathroom."

I feel like a parody of a teenager as I sullenly plop back into my seat.

We eat in silence for a few minutes, the deliciousness of mother's cooking smothering the lingering vomit flavor in my mouth.

"So how's school?" My father asks, accusingly. Everything's an accusation with him.

"Fine. Beth got a new haircut."

"I didn't ask about Bethany's new haircut, I asked about school."

I sigh and roll my eyes. My mother, strangely, doesn't berate my poor manners.

"I'm supposed to do a project on witch burnings."

He scoffs. "Hope they don't expect some feminazi, leftist gibberish out of you. Just stick to the facts, and you'll do fine."

"I know how to write an essay, dad."

"Don't take that tone with me. Just your old man giving you some helpful guidance."

"Thanks." I say flatly.

He drops his cutlery on his plate and looks incredulously at my mother.

"What did I just say about the tone?"

"I don't know! I couldn't hear over the sound of your cutlery clattering!"

Seriously, if I had done that, he'd have flipped out over potentially damaging the dishware.

"Could you for once in your life respect your father?"

"I'm trying, it's just that you're not giving me a lot to work with."

"That's it." he slams his hand on the table. 'Phone. Now."

"What?! Over what?"

It goes on like that for a while. I wind up losing my phone.

Still my mother doesn't say anything.

The next day is Saturday, glorious Saturday. Father works late on Saturdays, so that's always a plus. I am in my room, listening to music, trying to muster the energy to do homework. I'm unsure how long I've been not doing anything.

I hear the front door open and close. Mother must have come back from some shopping. I expect her to yell at me to come unpack groceries, but I am so fucking tired, I'm sure I'll sleep through it. But instead, mother knocks on my bedroom door. She doesn't wait for an answer before coming in. She is holding a white plastic bag from the drug store.

I stare at her in confusion.

"Jane, take these."

Still confused, I take the plastic bag and look inside. My blood freezes and my stomach roils.

Pregnancy tests. At least 5 of them.

I don't say anything. I just get up and go to the nearest bathroom. She follows me with another bag that contains a 2 litre bottle of my favourite soda. I close the door behind me.

I follow the instructions, and I wait for my fate to be revealed. And pray for the first time in 5 years that it will be kind to me.

"You know, these can be wrong. I'm not sure when my last period was and-and diluting the urine that much by doing a bunch of tests, it might not be what it says it is."

"That's for a false negative, honey."

"Well, let me double check." I start groping around my bed for my phone, before remembering that my father took it. My hands are shaking and I realize my voice is too.

"You're more easily irritated than usual."

Wrong. I'm less restrained in expressing that irritation than usual.

"You puked up your favourite food."

"People puke, it happens. That's a little uh-*lacking* to go on for this kind of-"

"If you're anything like me, those are the only real signs you'll be showing at this point. I didn't realize I was pregnant with you until it was- I mean, I didn't realize until later."

Really? That's news.

"I didn't realize I was an accident baby."

"Happiest accident to ever happen. But yes, an accident."

But she looks too scared shitless to smile.

We sit in an awkward, sober silence for a little while.

"Was it rape?" I can hear the hope in her voice.

What the fuck kind of mother hopes her daughter was raped?

I sigh. "It wasn't rape. We were both really drunk and not thinking clearly. We used a condom, but I guess we didn't put it on right."

"Oh."

It's silent for a little longer until someone's car alarm goes off. Everything feels both too real and unbelievable.

"Was he the only one? What's his name?"

"Uh, Doyle." I lie.

"Doyle. Have I met him? Is he a nice boy? Does he treat you right?"

I'm wordless for too long.

How can I explain to my aggressively conservative, pro-life, anti-sex, anti-fun mother that I didn't even know his name, and that he's not even the 2nd, the 3rd, the 4th, or the 10th?

How can I explain to my mother that I fucking hate myself, and that I force myself to fuck random guys to punish myself for being so fucked up. Except my way of punishing myself only shows that I was stupider than I thought.

Because now my mother is sitting in my desk chair across from me with 7 different positive pregnancy tests behind her.

Because now it can't be denied what I am:

Slut.

I cry as the word brands itself across my mind.

I'm so stupid.

My mother gets up and sits on the bed next to me, cooing that it'll be alright. I can barely focus on what she's saying. My life is flashing before my eyes, or rather the life I might never have: college, traveling, partying, starting a family, because who wants to marry a teen mom?

I'm so stupid.

So stupid.

My father comes home for lunch and my mother leaves. I don't give a shit.

My life might as well literally be over. Because my mother knows about it, which means my father will soon know about it. And I can then choose between giving birth to a kid I don't want, or getting an abortion and getting kicked out of the house *if I'm lucky*.

And that would still be the best case scenario, because abortion is against the law where I live. I could do serious prison time if I get caught. And I somehow doubt prison is as glamorous as it appears on certain television shows.

Could I put the kid up for adoption? I mean, moms have all these hormones that get them attached to their precious little mistake; could I just say "fuck biology" and give this thing to a stranger?

I'm staring up at the ceiling, lying flat on my back. It's the same plaster sky it's been my entire life, with the same glow-in-the-dark stars above me. They are splayed in a smiley face.

I've never felt closer to my 7 year old self. Never realized what a fucking child I am. Never-Knock knock knock.

"Jane?" Mother interrupts my musings by turning the door handle. But she doesn't open it. "May I come in?"

After a brief pause, I stammer, "Y-yeah."

She comes in, shuts the door behind her and resumes her place in front of my desk.

"Your father's gone for a while. I didn't tell him."

I push myself up to a seating position. "Why?"

"Because we need to talk options."

I flop back down. "I'm aware of my options, thanks. I can either get rid of it and go to Hell, or keep it and go to a *living* Hell."

"There's always adoption."

I frown. I am unsure how to feel about that.

"What do you want out of life, honey?"

I keep frowning. "I don't know. I'd like to go to college, and travel. Maybe have a family when I'm older. But that's..."

I trail off and stare down the stars. I'm all cried out at this point. "Why didn't you tell dad?"

"A baby would get in the way of your plans. You can't backpack through Europe pushing a stroller. And it's very difficult to take classes while taking care of a baby."

"Yeah, I know. That's why I'm lamenting my wasted youth."

"So it's settled. We'll pull you out for the year (you can homeschool), and then you can give the baby up for adoption."

"No, it's not decided! I push myself up again. 'I don't want to, like, bring a baby into the world and then not love it. Besides, could I even give up the baby after having grown it inside me and birthed it? I'm not fit to be a mother right now, and I'm not fit to quit being one later.'"

I'm a little surprised at myself for saying something so concise, but find that it's true. I couldn't nurture this thing for 9 months only to give it away at the end. I know that it would break my heart. I almost laugh at the irony.

I'm sure the pro-lifers would love hearing that.

"Something funny?" Mother sounds a little offended, as though I owe her better manners.

I glare at her, weighing my options. A sudden wave of spite overcomes me, reminding me that *she did this. She wanted this.*

"Honestly, mother, if I wasn't sure I'd get caught and go to prison, I'd get an abortion. 100 times out of 100."

She says nothing but sort of rocks herself back and forth for a minute.

It gets a little uncomfortable, and I'm about to say something when she finally says, "Well, that's it, then."

"That's what then?"

"Th-then we will find a- ah. We'll get you the procedure."

Abortion hasn't always been illegal where I live. For most of my life, it was legal. But it's been chipped away at by lunatics over the years. Women needed to see an ultrasound. No federal money for the procedure. Clinics needed to have certain size hallways, and certain ceilings, and all this at a certain fucking temperature.

Chip chip chip chip.

Mother was a big chipper. There was a period around my 10th birthday when she went to those psycho protests to harass women outside of clinics every weekend. She only stopped when the law of the land changed: no more abortions under any circumstances.

Fuck her. And fuck my dad too, for driving her there, if nothing else.

Mother pulls over the car. I look out the window at the river; it looks far less polluted at night.

"What are we-"

Mother ignores me and gets out. I follow her so I can throw up in a bush.

She walks to the river and throws several things in, like she's skipping rocks.

The pregnancy tests, probably.

When we get back in the car she starts it up again immediately. I pop five pieces of gum in my mouth.

"Were those the tests?" My gum makes a smacking noise as I talk around it.

She inhales deeply before answering.

"Yes."

"You know, they'll probably figure it out anyway, seeing as how you bought the tests in the first place."

"I bought them out of town. I didn't park near any security cameras."

"Oh. That's good."

We're quiet for about an hour. I swallow my gum, and mother doesn't chastise me for it.

"Okay, what next? Where are we going?"

She says nothing for a long while. Then, "We're going to visit an acquaintance of mine."

"What acquaintances do you have that could help us commit a felony."

She inhales deeply. "A doctor."

"There are tons of doctors; what makes this one special?"

....

"Mom? Why are we going to this doctor?"

She speaks slowly, deliberately. "We're going to this doctor, because she's the one who helped me with my own abortion."

It's a stunned silence that greets this pronouncement. It slowly gives way to disgust and contempt.

"What are you talking about? You've always believed that fetuses were babies."

"It was shortly after the Unborn Infant Protection Act passed; it just w-wasn't a good time to get pregnant."

I snort laugh.

"And I suppose all those pregnancies other women had were all well-timed blessings?"

"I n-needed to not get any more tied to your father. We were getting a divorce."

I can't even linger on that.

"Why? Was he abusive? Because that's the situation you left countless other women in; now they can't ever leave their abusive husbands."

"Th-there are resources that can help them."

I snort another laugh. "Barely."

"I just couldn't have another kid, I j-just couldn't."

Mother's hands are shaking on the wheel. I couldn't give less of a shit.

"That didn't matter when other women were pregnant. It didn't matter for women who were trapped in prostitution, or had plans, or just couldn't stand the thought of getting pregnant!"

"I-i-it wasn't like th-that." she stammers.

"How could you ever justify that to yourself? How could you even *think* of getting-"

She shrieks at me, "Because you were a mistake! I would have had an abortion if I had known you were-"

She cuts herself off, horrified. But it's a little late.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean that-"

I hold up my hand to stop her speaking.

My head is buzzing.

What can I even say back?

I retreat into the quiet, and think. I look out the window at the dark world passing me by, and ask myself a foolish question:

How could I have subjected her to something that I am so desperate to avoid myself?

We stop in front of a house in an upper class neighborhood. We both undo our seatbelts. We make no effort to get out of the car for several minutes.

I am numb.

"I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean it."

"You did mean it, but that's okay."

It's not, and it probably will never be okay between us again, if it ever was. How could it be, knowing that I am probably the biggest regret of her life?

We sit in silence again.

A woman in pajamas with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth stomps towards the car.

"Hey! Fuck off or I'll call the cops. I am not fucking around."

I can see that she's carrying a cellphone in one hand and a gun in the other. Holy fuck.

Mother rolls down her window. She clears her throat.

"Dr. Maryam."

The apparent doctor squints and my mother turns on the car light.

"Holy shit. I cannot believe you have the nerve to-"

Dr. Maryam's eyes slide over to me.

"Ah. I see. Well, come on in; talking outside is a bit too conspicuous."

A few minutes later, we're sitting at a kitchen table drinking lackluster tea. There is a wine bottle acting as a vase in her window.

"I kind of figured the last time we saw each other was the last time I would have to deal with your hypocritical bullshit."

"You were a lot more hospitable last time."

"I'm not on duty. I am in my private residence, talking to a stranger who stalked and harassed me for months, and who is asking me to help her at great risk to myself. I'll be as inhospitable as I damn well please."

Stalked? Who the hell is my mother?

"I may have – uh, done a few questionable things."

The doctor scoffs. She stubs out her cigarette in a potted plant.

"But my daughter hasn't. She's always been on your side."

That's not, strictly speaking, true, but the doctor softens when she hears it.

"Not sure why you think I can help you. You know there are mail order services out there, right?"

Mother puts her tea down. "I, uh, didn't trust them, and wasn't sure they'd get here in time. And my husband-

I hear a door click shut. There's another mug in Dr. Maryam's sink.

She looks at me; it seems she notices me noticing.

"Do you have your phones on you?"

We shake our heads no.

"A teenager who's not glued to her phone? You expect me to believe that?"

"My father confiscated it."

"Why? He find out?"

"No, I mouthed off to him."

"Hmmm." She looks at mother. "And how about you, Mom-of-the-Year? You got your phone on you?"

"N-no, it's at home. I memorized the directions to your house. And I only looked up directions on a public computer the next town over."

"Alright. Kid, you ever look up pregnancy signs? Is there anything potentially felonious in your search history?"

"No, I only realized yesterday. And then mom told me she'd take care of it."

"How far along?"

I do some quick math. "12 weeks, at most."

"Cutting it close. Do you have a period tracker on your phone?"

"Uh, yes."

"When you get your phone back, you're going to write that you started your period yesterday."

"Okay."

"Usually there are two medications to take, but...." The doctor grabs the wine bottle vase from the window sill.

"But what?" I ask.

"Buuut I'm out of the first one, so you'll have to rely entirely on the second. Don't worry, it will still work, it'll just take a few more pills."

She plucks the lily out of the bottle, then tips the bottle over a small dish. A clattering of pills cascades out. She counts out 12 of them.

"This is misoprostol. It's for stomach ulcers."

Mom pulls out a bottle of advil. She pours the pills inside.

"Thank you."

"Dissolve 4 under your tongue for 30 minutes. Do not speak or eat during this time. After the 30 minutes, wash what remains down with water. Take some ibuprofen, because acetaminophen and paracetamol won't be sufficient. Wait 3 hours, then repeat. Wait another 3 hours and then use the last of the pills."

'It's rare that anything bad will happen. But if you soak 2 heavy pads with blood in under an hour, develop a fever over 38 degrees Celsius, your blood is different from usual (like a different color), or you have an allergic reaction, *go to the hospital*. Miscarriage and a *specific* medical procedure that we are not discussing do not look any different from each other. Got that?"

Mom nods, unable to make eye contact. "I remember."

"And next time? Just take a chance with a mail order service."

In the car a few minutes later, we are again not saying anything. The lily is back in the doctor's window.

Mom starts driving. Once we leave the wealthy neighborhood, she speaks again.

"You must think I'm the vilest sort of hypocrite."

"...No."

It's a lie, but a dispassionate one. I don't care what she is right now; I just want to avoid talking about it.

Mom's face contorts as she tries not to cry.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, Jane. I never- I never wanted to say those things. I never- I'm so sorry."

She's weeping now, and I tell her, "Mom, you have to get off the road."

She pulls into a sandy shoulder and buries her head in her hands.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry!"

"It's okay."

"Y-you are the best thing in my life, Jane. I never meant to hurt you."

I stare at her. Her watery eyes meet mine in desperate search for something. I don't think I can give it.

There is a question filling my mouth becoming almost too big to ask.

I swallow it down. I don't want to know.

"I love you, mom."

I hug her. It's awkward and stiff and not just due to our positions.

"I love you, my baby girl. My sweet, wonderful girl. I'm so sorry."

"I know."

I withdraw and go back to looking out the window. It's only a few more seconds until we're back on the road.

We don't talk the rest of the ride.

Blood and pain. The pain is not unlike very bad cramps, only worse. I remind myself several times that this is significantly less painful than birth. Less dangerous, too.

I suffer no complications. I don't feel anything other than relief. So I guess that's it.

3 months on, the three of us are sitting in the living room watching whatever sports bullshit father has on.

Or he's watching; mom is knitting a baby sweater for the church bazaar, and I am staring vacantly at my phone.

Things have been... weird between mom and me. I don't forgive her, but I can't really vent at her, can I? I mean, she can't exactly help how she feels. Am I mad at her for not suffering in silence longer?

I meet mom's eyes and they are somber. I wonder if she's thinking the same things as me.

I can't exactly hate her. Because now we have a secret that binds us together. Proof that she does love me, even if she regrets me.

Father cheers, oblivious. She returns her attention to her knitting.

Does she have secrets with him? Is that why they didn't get a divorce? I wonder how many secrets she has that I'm not a part of.

Silence rules her heart.

And when I think that, I almost start crying; I am overcome with a deep, deep sorrow for the girl my mother used to be. And guilt over the woman she could have been.

Essay: Thinking About Dowries by Becky Regins

Becky Regins is a woman in her 30s living in Northern Europe. She works in IT.

Dowry is a payment that bride's family pays to the groom's family upon their marriage.

While growing up, I thought of dowry as a material wealth that the bride takes with her to her new home, and which helps her establish herself materially. Typically it would be fabrics that she has woven herself, which now can be used to make clothes for her family and which also showcase her talent, skills, and how hard-working she is. For example, I have a wool blanket that was woven by my grandma as an item for her dowry. And when I became fascinated with weaving and other "female crafts" you bet my grandmas were very proud and kept saying that I will have something in my dowry.

This tradition is pretty much dead, my other grandma didn't have any dowry and neither did my mom, and me neither (sorry grandmas!).

As such I didn't think of dowry as anything negative or oppressive, only practical – it makes sense that when you start a new family, there's no time to weave, you already have to have the fabrics, and also that both newly-weds have to contribute (groom is contributing by giving a place to live in his home).

The first time I got the feeling that my understanding of dowry was incorrect was when I was reading a historical novel (about renaissance period), and there the family was collecting a very rich dowry for the daughter who was going to... become a nun. Why would you come with all kinds of fabrics and moneys to the monastery where there would be no use for such? The nuns are celibate, they won't have children or husbands to dress, so why? After a bit of pondering I came to the conclusion that monasteries aren't self-sufficient economically, and so the money and the fabrics were used to pay for food and materials and maybe to also to line the pockets of high ranking priests or something, and also the more the family pays the more they are respected in the community plus can expect more mentions in thoughts and prayers. Makes sense, I guess.

Then again I was researching the Indian custom of suttee/sati, and stumbled upon not only insane numbers of female foeticide/infanticide, but also bride burnings. Where again my understanding of dowries was shaken. If the bride's family doesn't pay the promised dowry, groom's family burns the bride alive. Which makes no sense! Why would you do something this evil? Why wouldn't you just send the poor bride back? Why would you tarnish your own family's name as evil monsters who kill innocent women over money? How would you be able to find a bride to your son after a show like this?

I've put my horror and the new piece of knowledge I've acquired in the back burner.

And now I have to reconcile with my knowledge once again. This time because I am reading short fictional stories about unhappy marriages at the end of 19th century in rural areas of my country. So, the parents of my grandparents generation. The stories are fictional, but they are inspired by real events, real oppression women faced. Marriages made just because the bride or her family could give a rich dowry, while neither the groom nor the bride fancied each other. It was stupid, but not evil in the cases where the groom was a decent person. Now they'll both live miserably ever after, hooray. At least they'll have bread on their tables. But then there were also cases when the groom's family where outright stupid violent lazy alcoholics, but sitting on a good piece of land, and so the bride's family forced her to marry into this antisocial family just to be abused day in and day out... for what exactly? It's not like after paying of the dowry (which funnily enough is often paid in

money, not materials) the land has become theirs. They weren't farming it before and they didn't start doing it after the marriage, either. You'd think people would have figured it out? So why would they send their daughters away to live with some abusive strangers, get nothing from it, and even pay huge dowries to the groom's families to take the bride in?

It's cruel and it makes no sense. Why would people do this?

Of course my mistake is that I see women as people worthy of respect, with their hopes and dreams and personalities, with their own free will that should be respected. While patriarchal cultures see women as items, tools, objects to be traded around. But it still makes no sense. If a woman is an object sold into a slavery at another family's home, the money should be going the other way: from the groom's side to the bride's side, like seen in some other patriarchal cultures. If instead this is a scenario of "Facebook buys Instagram and rules over it as they see fit", the bride would become the head of her new family and everyone would obey her and do as she demands. Instead, more often than not she is treated as a slave. So what makes most sense in this scenario is that a woman is seen as a totally useless, worthless thing, a drain on resources, an extra mouth to feed, hated so much that her family is trying to get rid of her and thus has to pay someone else to take her in. But it's still nonsensical since the dowries are often made by brides themselves, meaning that they bring worth with their skills, and if the dowry is in money, it means that the family is rich enough to afford to have the woman themselves. No matter how I look at it, it makes no sense. Only one thing is clear: misogyny is at the core of this tradition. But there still has to be some wicked logic behind it, a certain problem to solve by dowries? But what could it be?

Looking at the dowry tradition that's still alive in the Indian subcontinent, it looks mostly like a racket. You take in a bride and her dowry, but then start to pester her and her family into giving more, more, more. A car, a new smartphone, a flat-screen TV, you name it. And you also threaten to kill the bride if your demands aren't met. And when you kill the bride, you can take another one in and terrorize her, until you acquire some wealth. This is beyond fucked up. If they loved their daughters they wouldn't let them marry, or at the very least rush to take them back into safety at the first sign of trouble. But I guess they don't (hello misogyny).

I can only speculate that dowries were supposed to give women power over their own lives. The better they worked the better marriage they could expect. The more they could provide the more they would be respected and valued by their families. But it was tainted by misogyny and instead became a proof of women's worthlessness: surely if the woman had any worth she wouldn't be paying to take her in? And now, in its modern iterations, it's nothing else but a racket. Pay if you don't want to burn alive.

As for the dowry as a way of having wealth when a woman starts her own life... why should she take it to the groom's family, and not keep it to herself? If her dowry is rich, she can live by herself, without tying herself to people who might not value her. If not rich enough, she could band with other women. It is especially possible where women can have education and work and don't need a male to rule their lives. I wish more women around the world would see it as a great alternative it is.

So this is what I'm thinking about while weaving, sewing, or wrapping myself in my grandma's wool blanket.

Our Roots: Suffrage Songs and Verses by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Editor's note: Originally published in 1911, the verses now serve as a picture of time of women's suffrage. Some things have changed, yet some things remain the same.

These works are in public domain.

NOW

With God Above—Beneath—Beside—
Without—Within—and Everywhere;
Rising with the resistless tide
Of life, and Sure of Getting There.
Patient with Nature's long delay,
Proud of our conscious upward swing;
Not sorry for a single day,
And Not Afraid of Anything!
With Motherhood at last awake—
With Power to Do and Light to See—
Women may now begin to Make
The People we are Meant to Be!

FOR FEAR

For fear of prowling beasts at night
They blocked the cave;
Women and children hid from sight,
Men scarce more brave.
For fear of warrior's sword and spear
They barred the gate;
Women and children lived in fear,
Men lived in hate.
For fear of criminals today
We lock the door;
Women and children still to stay
Hid evermore.
Come out! Ye need no longer hide!
What fear you now?
No wolf nor lion waits outside—

Only a cow.
Come out! The world approaches peace,
War nears its end;
No warrior watches your release—
Only a friend.
Come out! The night of crime has fled—
Day is begun;
Here is no criminal to dread—
Only your son.
The world, half yours, demands your care,
Waken and come!
Make it a woman's world; safe, fair,
Garden and home.

THE HOUSEWIFE

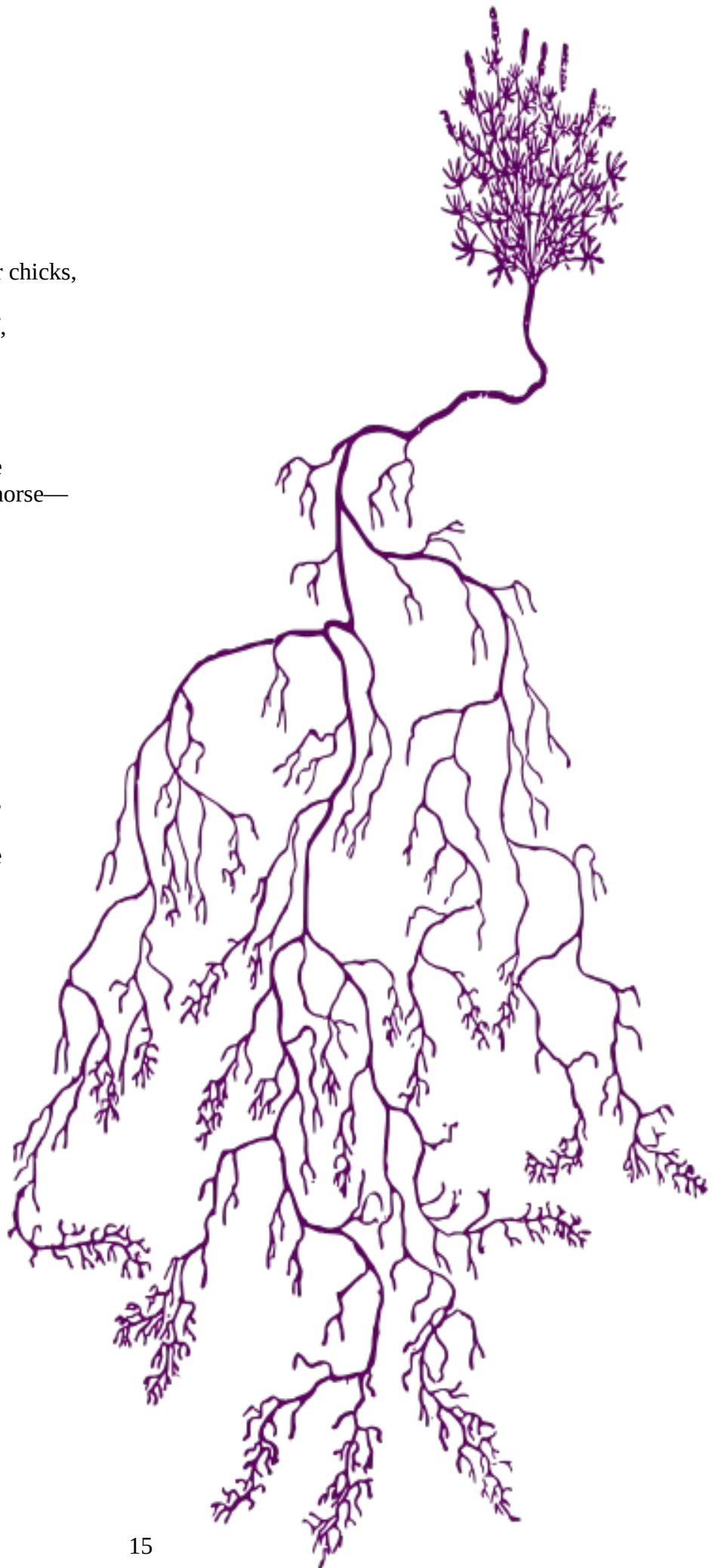
Here is the House to hold me—cradle of all the race;
Here is my lord and my love, here are my children dear—
Here is the House enclosing, the dear-loved dwelling place;
Why should I ever weary for aught that I find not here?
Here for the hours of the day and the hours of the night;
Bound with the bands of Duty, rivetted tight;
Duty older than Adam—Duty that saw
Acceptance utter and hopeless in the eyes of the serving squaw.
Food and the serving of food—that is my daylong care;
What and when we shall eat, what and how we shall wear;
Soiling and cleaning of things—that is my task in the main—
Soil them and clean them and soil them—soil them and clean them again.
To work at my trade by the dozen and never a trade to know;
To plan like a Chinese puzzle—fitting and changing so;
To think of a thousand details, each in a thousand ways;
For my own immediate people and a possible love and praise.
My mind is trodden in circles, tiresome, narrow and hard,
Useful, commonplace, private—simply a small backyard;
And I the Mother of Nations!—Blind their struggle and vain!—
I cover the earth with my children—each with a housewife's brain.

WEDDED BLISS

"O come and be my mate!" said the Eagle to the Hen;
"I love to soar, but then
I want my mate to rest
Forever in the nest!"
Said the Hen, "I cannot fly,
I have no wish to try,
But I joy to see my mate careening through the sky!"
They wed, and cried, "Ah, this is Love, my own!"
And the Hen sat, the Eagle soared, alone.
"O come and be my mate!" said the Lion to the Sheep;
"My love for you is deep!
I slay, a Lion should,
But you are mild and good!"
Said the sheep, "I do no ill—
Could not, had I the will—
But I joy to see my mate pursue, devour and kill."
They wed, and cried, "Ah, this is Love, my own!"
And the Sheep browsed, the Lion prowled, alone.
"O come and be my mate!" said the Salmon to the Clam;
"You are not wise, but I am.
I know sea and stream as well,
You know nothing but your shell."
Said the Clam, "I'm slow of motion,
But my love is all devotion,
And I joy to have my mate traverse lake and stream and ocean!"
They wed, and cried, "Ah, this is Love, my own!"
And the Clam sucked, the Salmon swam, alone.

FEMALES

The female fox she is a fox;
The female whale a whale;
The female eagle holds her place
As representative of race
As truly as the male.
The mother hen doth scratch for her chicks,
And scratch for herself beside;
The mother cow doth nurse her calf,
Yet fares as well as her other half
In the pasture free and wide.
The female bird doth soar in air;
The female fish doth swim;
The fleet-foot mare upon the course
Doth hold her own with the flying horse—
Yea and she beateth him!
One female in the world we find
Telling a different tale.
It is the female of our race,
Who holds a parasitic place
Dependent on the male.
Not so, saith she, ye slander me!
No parasite am I.
I earn my living as a wife;
My children take my very life;
Why should I share in human strife,
To plant and build and buy?
The human race holds highest place
In all the world so wide,
Yet these inferior females wive,
And raise their little ones alive,
And feed themselves beside.
The race is higher than the sex,
Though sex be fair and good;
A Human Creature is your state,
And to be human is more great
Than even womanhood!
The female fox she is a fox;
The female whale a whale;
The female eagle holds her place
As representative of race
As truly as the male.



WOMEN DO NOT WANT IT

When the woman suffrage argument first stood upon its legs,
They answered it with cabbages, they answered it with eggs,
They answered it with ridicule, they answered it with scorn,
They thought it a monstrosity that should not have been born.
When the woman suffrage argument grew vigorous and wise,
And was not to be answered by these opposite replies,
They turned their opposition into reasoning severe
Upon the limitations of our God-appointed sphere.
We were told of disabilities—a long array of these,
Till one could think that womanhood was merely a disease;
And "the maternal sacrifice" was added to the plan
Of the various sacrifices we have always made—to man.
Religionists and scientists, in amity and bliss,
However else they disagreed, could all agree on this,
And the gist of all their discourse, when you got down in it,
Was—we could not have the ballot because we were not fit!
They would not hear the reason, they would not fairly yield,
They would not own their arguments were beaten in the field;
But time passed on, and somehow, we need not ask them how,
Whatever ails those arguments—we do not hear them now!
You may talk of suffrage now with an educated man,
And he agrees with all you say, as sweetly as he can:
'T would be better for us all, of course, if womanhood was free;
But "the women do not want it"—and so it must not be!
'T is such a tender thoughtfulness! So exquisite a care!
Not to pile on our frail shoulders what we do not wish to bear!
But, oh, most generous brother! Let us look a little more—
Have we women always wanted what you gave to us before?
Did we ask for veils and harems in the Oriental races?
Did we beseech to be "unclean," shut out of sacred places?
Did we beg for scolding bridles and ducking stools to come?
And clamor for the beating stick no thicker than your thumb?
Did we ask to be forbidden from all the trades that pay?
Did we claim the lower wages for a man's full work today?
Have we petitioned for the laws wherein our shame is shown:
That not a woman's child—nor her own body—is her own?
What women want has never been a strongly acting cause,
When woman has been wronged by man in churches, customs, laws;
Why should he find this preference so largely in his way,
When he himself admits the right of what we ask today?

Forbidden Questions

Why is womanhood a costume anyone can opt into when women don't even have equal rights as men across the world? – *By anonymous, 26*

If body hair is gross and unhygienic, why aren't men shamed into removing it all?
How come a man who barely declares "she/her" as his pronouns but changes absolutely nothing about his body, is stunning and brave and valid and don't you dare question people's self-identification, but a woman who had her breasts cut off and ovaries and uterus removed and took testosterone which permanently altered her features and later came to regret it has never really been trans? – *By Becky, in her 30s, Northern Europe*

In the next issue

The focus of the next issue is **rules of misogyny**, and we'll start with **rule #1: women are responsible for what men do**.

Send your essays, anecdotes, fiction, you name it, to zine@roots.pub before the winter solstice in northern hemisphere / summer solstice in southern hemisphere.

Be a part of women's liberation movement



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