

Gina Mercer

POST CHRISTMAS LETTER

dear sister

its the time of year when i can lean out my window and pick perfect pungent frangipanni flowers as the fleas blossom round my ankles have got past christmas again am wearing my old cream silk slip — silk from the glory box of old aunt rachel — sewn by my mother what a seamstress — more stress than seam we used to say its the best thing to wear on hot nights — intimate cool

tonight i'm cooking myself a really special meal to celebrate what am i celebrating myself and being on my own in this large light space i've come to call home celebrating a whole year of living alone happily spinsterhood is wonderful lack of complexities independence joy in a bowl of steamed peas in a new rock & roll song turned up LOUD on the radio in time to think and write unadulterated luxury self-indulgence in the very best of senses two whiskies a meal of the best ingredients and no-one to share it or keep it waiting or complain about it or rave about it just dinner for one no-one to suggest that "we're eating too much lately" or "such self-indulgence is not ideologically sound" just pure sensual pleasure in the meal in the moment the quiet unannounced moment to celebrate aloneness

tell you what i did this christmas i went away went away from the family away from all the duty invitations i might have made or accepted went to a house near a beach a house full of women and food the moon was full we walked along the beach it was filled by the moon a feeling full of pleasure spending christmas with some of my close women friends a real witches christmas full of a certain sort of magic one night i happened to look under the dinner table i saw eighteen happy sandy slender suntanned feet all enjoying themselves on the floor under the table i saw the child of one of these women lying under the table protected by the magic ring of contented feet every now and then she stroked one of the feet and they stirred gently under her small brown hand to show their extreme goodwill there was absolutely no fear of a kick under that table



after coming back here i was attacked by a rampaging guilt about Family weakened i agreed to go to uncle bob's annual barbeque a big mistake sitting there bored and unhappy i found myself looking at the collected feet they were very clean and very white soft pudgy white dry around the heel cracking with dryness the toenails were misshapen grotesque sharp ingrown repressed sore feet swollen lumpy with corns there was no joy in those feet pleasure had been stubbed squashed squeezed out they formed no protective circle they turned away from each other at awkward angles ashamed of their ingrained unhappiness

only spent one afternoon with those unhappy feet a sad afternoon lots of people related people speaking but not communicating lots of noise — cricket on the radio blustering long raves about wine sausages flysprays birdcages not much laughter except when one of the uncles told yet another joke about some other bloke's balls

really glad i spent christmas away in that circle of happy female feet now i lean out my window and pick another frangipanni stick it between my toes as they loll on the desk they probably love the smell of summer too think my dinner will have cooked itself by now hope you enjoyed your summer too write soon

love to you and all your toes