

I realize I have many unresolved feelings about our relationship and the abuse I suffered at the hands of the women I loved and who loved me. Another woman encouraged me to give some thought to the idea that violence itself can be considered an intimate act and experienced as such despite the pain and disbelief due to feelings of remorse, guilt, reparation and loving that come after. Looking at the violence in the relationship in this way has helped me accept some of the feelings of love and caring that I continue to feel for my partner even after everything she did to me. I feel angry when I think that through all the hell I endured, there was nowhere I felt I could turn. The lesbians I did speak to were adamant that I not talk about this too much or go to any type of shelter for help. Their biggest fear (and a very realistic one) was that the lesbian community as a whole would suffer even more abuse and derision from heterosexual society, which already saw us as sick and perverse. Not finding any kind of

support from my own community of women hurt almost as much as the betrayal I felt in the relationship.

While I do agree that there are similarities between the abuse suffered in male-female partnerships and the abuse in lesbian relationships, I believe that it is important to recognize the differences. The emotional damage done by same-sex violence can have an added devastation in lesbian relationships. Public education has provided most of us with an awareness of the extent and pervasiveness of male violence against women. Nothing in my experience prepared me for abuse I might suffer at the hands of another woman.

My one hope is that this lack of support is rectified before more life is lost. I wanted to kill myself because of the abuse I was suffering and also because I knew I had nowhere to go for help. Fortunately, I was one of the lucky ones who has lived to talk about my experience. Others are not and will not be so lucky. We cannot afford to lose any more women to the violence —

whether it is suffered at the hands of men or other women.

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Adrienne Blenman is a black lesbian feminist, currently a student at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counselor/Advocate Program. She has a B.Sc. in psychology and hopes to become a feminist therapist working with women of colour around issues of childhood rape/abuse, sexual assault and lesbian battering

fable

what shape did you imagine
coming for you out of the snow
as I prepared to leave
your tiny face
pressed against glass

what's wrong? and you said
almost under your breath:
the baby slitter is coming

how could I not laugh
robbing language of its terror
its power

and how could I not laugh
when you searched
for your library book on its
day doomed
because it had to go back
to where it came from

*write a story so that children
won't get hurt
or taken away*
you tell me as you leave for school

so I begin
to write a fable at that moment
I know you are standing on the road

the entrance to the park
is to your left

you give it wide berth
wait for the traffic to clear
and turn towards school

remember this fable
on the day I am unable
to imagine where you might be

on the day you turn left
instead of right

following the twisted path
that leads to the river:

A little girl is lost in a city park. The trees lift their bare limbs in a sour wind that blows around the planet, picking up the scent of deserts and factories and the moldy smell of old mine shafts. Every time she closes her eyes she thinks she might be somewhere different; the dust bowl of Africa, she thinks, or the raw green edge of stripped rain forest, but when she opens her eyes, there is only the snowy park, and she is alone. Men in uniform are dragging the black river for the body of a woman last seen balanced on the railing on a bridge. She hopes it is not her mother. She doesn't go near. The moon above is milky white, suddenly blocked by a man hanging over her like a shabby shadow. She backs away, feels the chainlink fence bit-

ing into her shoulders and wonders if he will leave her alone if she is polite, if she says *please*. As his hands come out of his pockets, a voice calls across the snow: *Hey!*, and he turns, spits words that she's seen scrawled under the bridge, then shrinks away when he sees the whirling shape, an animal blur of fur circling, tracking by scent. The girl lifts her eyes, and there she is; a fierce young woman with white hair spiked around her head like a solar eclipse. From her ear hangs a starfish on a chain. *Your mother sent me*, she says. Then, she whistles, and the animal leaps into her arms, nuzzles back inside her coat as she stoops to help the child stand. *It's a ferret. Do you want to hold it?* The young woman unbuttons her coat and the child is surprised by how soft and white her breasts are. The ferret's claws have left red dents, but the skin isn't broken. The child forgets she is lost. She touches its slinky, quivering length, so furtive and so explosive under her small hand. *If you're not afraid, it can help you*, and she places the ferret inside the child's coat, warm, where her breast will grow one day. The woman walks away and leaves her, the ferret curled next to her heart.

Nadine McInnis