

# Wet

# Hibiscus

Cafe latte  
Cappuccino  
Espresso  
Jasmine tea  
Raspberry tea

Hibiscus tea...gigantic apricot double blooms, like labia folded in around each other, wet with dew and inviting a hungry tongue to lap up their moisture in the hot Hawai'ian sun.

"So whad'ya want, sister?"

Cowrie looks at the young dyke behind the counter, fascinated to see that waistcoats are back in fashion, minus all the dyke buttons of the seventies in Aotearoa.

"Hibiscus, thanks."

"Sure. Anything to eat?"

Cowrie is tempted to say hibiscus but realizes the dyke won't have a clue what she's on about. She is actually longing for vegemite, some kind of savory flavor, so she eyes the croissants.

"Blue cheese croissant with sprouts will be great, thanks."

"Wannit melted?"

"Yeah. Ta."

The dyke swings around, gathers the croissant, plasters it with blue cheese, pokes it under the grill and tends to the hibiscus tea.

"Are Alice, Carol, or Natalie around?" Cowrie asks, not wanting to disturb the young woman's concentration as she pours out the hot water.

"Who?"

"Well, when I was over here doing research in the eighties, they established Mama Bears. I helped out the painting. It was a really exciting time, since these women had also started up the first women's bookstore in America—A Woman's Place, in Oakland—until the new politically correct collective chucked them out for being old-fashioned working class dykes."

"Really? I've seen 'em about, but I only work here on afternoon shifts between my studies, so I'm usually gone before they come for the evening events."

by Cath Dunsford

"They are amazing women.

Carol was one of the famous dykes in Judy

Grahn's *Common Woman Poems*—you know, 'Carol with her crescent wrench'?"

The young dyke looks at Cowrie as if she's crazy.

"Was she into S/M or something?"

"I don't think that was it. More a woman capable of fixing her own car."

"Oh." The young dyke looks disappointed.

"Judy Grahn was working on the final revision for *Another Mother Tongue* then and a small group of us workshopped and gave feedback on it, right here in Mama Bears Bookstore. Paula Gunn Allen held Women Warrior classes to reclaim our lost warrior selves, using her own Native

American traditions.

Beth Brant launched the first Native American Women's Anthology at the opening night of Mama Bears. This bookstore holds living herstories within its walls."

The young dyke does not seem to know the names

Cowrie mentions, does not seem that interested.

"So what are you studying?"

Cowrie asks.

"I'm in the Gay and Lesbian Studies Program at UC Berkeley. Second year."

"Well, that's the group I'm teaching next semester. So you'd better do some homework," Cowrie ventures, smiling.

There is an immediate change of attitude.

"Really? I thought you must be from Fat Lip

*"Imagine  
entering into the face  
of a gigantic wet  
hibiscus..."*

Readers' Theatre and you were just putting on that accent to prepare for one of your shows. So you're the scholar from Australia. Pleased to meet you."

Cowrie is stunned. Not that she is called Australian; that's usual. U.S. geography is from movies and she remembers the fuss when *Crocodile Dundee* came out here. That's about the limit of their Pacific knowledge. But it is not this that concerns her. It has been some time since she has been singled out for identification solely on her looks as a large woman. And coming from a young dyke who has had all the opportunities Cowrie missed in her earlier years to understand these politics, she is still ignorant.

"So why did you think I was with Fat Lip?"

"Well," the woman blushes, "isn't that obvious?"

"Do they have many other Maori-Hawaiian-Pakeha actors, then?" Cowrie asks, pushing her case.

"I'm not sure. No. It's not that. It's well, you are rather chubby. Not that it isn't fine, but you really oughta get more exercise."

Cowrie is ready to explode. Just today she has walked from Grove to UC and the length of Telegraph—about three miles—and she'll do five by the time she has shopped and returned home. The usual per day for her.

"Well, here's some advice. You had just better go read *Shadow on a Tightrope* and everything else written since before you dare set foot in my Lesbian Studies course," Cowrie whispers into her ear.

The young dyke stares at her in disbelief. Cowrie feels guilty.

"Hey. That was a bit harsh, but it gets tiresome to have to defend myself, especially in safe havens where I least expect to. I won't hold it against you. What's your name?"

"D.K."

Cowrie leans over to whisper in her ear. "Well, D.K., next time you see a fat dyke, just try to imagine what it would be like to immerse yourself in the most erotic Georgia O'Keefe flower paintings, or Lariane Fonseca's sensuous photographs from *If Passion Were a Flower*. Imagine yourself floating on the ocean in a kayak, watching whales make love in the Baja Lagoon. The majesty, the beauty, the passion, the power. Imagine entering into the face of a gigantic wet hibiscus, savoring the moisture and moving your tongue up toward the tip which turns into an exploding frangipani bursting with the most fragrant, erotic perfume you are ever likely to

encounter. Then think about whether you'd rather lie down next to a blade of grass."

Now it's D.K.'s turn to be stunned. "Gee, I'm sorry. I never thought of it like that. So, what are you doing tonight?"

"Forget it, D.K. I never sleep with students and I'm already in love with a beautiful Hawai'ian woman." Cowrie doesn't add that they can't be together because Koana is blood family. "Thanks for the thought. Save it for the next luscious large woman who comes in here."

By now, the late afternoon lull has been replaced by women buying books and some coming over for coffee. Cowrie takes her tray and thanks D.K. for her croissant.

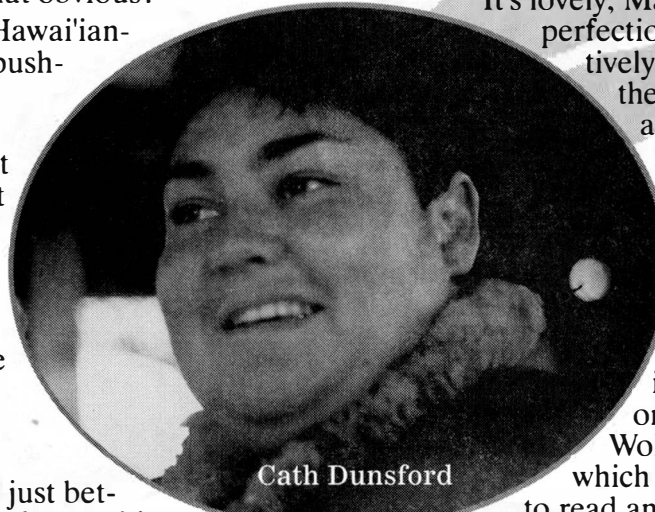
"It's lovely, Ma'am. Melted to perfection." She licks seductively around the edge of the croissant and winks at D.K. "I'll see you in class."

D.K. busies herself behind the bar but cannot get Cowrie's words from her head. She waits until the night rush is over and buys a second-hand copy of Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*,

which she'd been meaning to read anyway, but didn't really feel applied to her. She is thin, cute, spiky-haired and available. She never entertained the thought of ever sleeping with, being attracted to, or even being seen with anyone over 110 lbs.

She also finds an interesting essay in an old copy of *Radical Voices: Obesity and Women—A Neglected Feminist Topic*. She tucks the purple hardback into her pack and pays for both the books at the till. She doesn't know if she'd really bother if this foreign woman wasn't teaching the prescribed visiting scholar's course which all level two students have to take. Damn! But lucky she knows now. She'll do her research and get top marks. Or that's what D.K. thinks. And maybe she'll even score with a fat dyke, just to see what it's like. Wonder if there are fat dykes into S/M? One did come to a meeting at F.J.'s but she didn't stay. They were all relieved. D.K. knows this isn't what Cowrie intends, but she's not going to be lectured to by some scholar from a far flung island at the end of the world without a challenge. ✨

*Wet Hibiscus* is the first chapter of Cathie Dunsford's next novel.



Cath Dunsford