

## Fat Girl Dances with Rocks

Book by Susan Stinson, from Spinsters Ink, 1994.

—review by Selena

The title character is Char, a fat teenage girl who spends a summer smoking pot, dancing with and falling in love with her best friend Felice. They smoke, they drink, they cruise and go to discos, and Felice checks out the boys while Char checks out Felice. But then Felice goes away for the rest of the summer, and Char gets a job at a nursing home, gets to know some of the patients, and learns about friendship, having principles, and generally being a good person, as well as learning to be comfortable with, and like, her body. Not to make it sound self-conscious and moralizing, but it is, just a little. Don't get me wrong—it was absorbing enough; I read it straight through; but it was more of a snack than a meal. For me, the book is strongest when it's showing us the everyday adolescent stoner friendship between Char and Felice, and the details of their



photo by Susan Wilson

lives and interactions. Despite how much of what's important in the book is taking place in Char's head, she remains opaque to me as a character. I don't know what she's be like if I met her at a party or on the street, and the same goes for the women she's friends with in the nursing home. Felice is more in focus, but whatever Char finds so compelling about her didn't come across. One of the main things that happens to Char over the course of the book is her coming to terms with her body and deciding not to diet. Obviously, I think that's a great message and all, but it seemed to drop out of nowhere on her, an epiphany from on high. My girlfriend, who also read it, said this book seems like a 'young adult' story, and I think I agree with her. It was interesting enough and didn't bore me, but it's kind of thin (so to speak). There's only one thing going on at any given time, only one layer to the story. On the other hand, I might have found it more compelling when I was just coming out, since it is a coming-out story. But I think it's the teenager in me that is left so unsatisfied. The bulimic fifteen year old I was would really like to know where Char's appreciation and acceptance of her body came from; would like to know how the hell she did it. Is that even something that can be conveyed with words? I don't think I could do it. While I enjoyed reading this book, it ultimately didn't move me as much as I wish it had. ✨

# more reviews

## The Most Massive Woman Wins

Play by Madeleine George, 1994 Young Playwrights Festival, New York.

—review by Elizabeth Stark

Liposuction waiting room: the stage is bare, a chair in each corner. Four women of varying sizes sit reading fashion magazines. Waiting.

So opens the 1994 Young Playwrights Festival's production of Madeleine George's evocative play *The Most Massive Woman Wins*. Astonishingly, George was 18 when she submitted the play to the festival.

Each of the women tells her own story, and slowly they begin to interact and support each other in the telling. They delve into food issues, job discrimination on the basis of fat, pressure to lose weight from significant others (limited in this play to husbands and boyfriends), bulimia, self-destructiveness, and growing up fat.

"I see that to want and demand things is bad," the skinniest of the women remembers about her childhood. "When I finally want so little I can barely walk, my mother pulls me out from behind the chaise lounge and says, 'This is my daughter.'"

The most intense monologue comes from the fat housewife, her hair in a kerchief, who describes cutting her skin with kitchen knives and picking at her feet. "I wanted to take myself completely apart," she says. Eventually she set herself on fire. The ultimate consequence of her hatred for her flesh, she imagines, "Just me and my bones running naked through the forest, feeling the breeze." Though she saves herself, the site of her recounting is the liposuction waiting room, so this is no redemptive climax.

Other parts of the play are fiercely humorous: "Why did everyone always tell me I had beautiful skin?" one woman asks. And later, "I am so very tired of being everybody's warm and fuzzy sounding board. I want to be a full-blown sexual threat right now."

Childhood rhymes and chants are interspersed throughout, and the layers of their meanings are revealed by the context:

"She drank up all the water  
She ate up all the soap  
She tried to eat the bathtub  
But it wouldn't go down her throat."

At the end, the women shed the paper patient-coats they changed into earlier, and stand in slips, t-shirts, underwear. They seem to be collectively abandoning liposuction. They recite the beginning of the Rapunzel story, about a woman who had never asked for anything, but one day wanted a neighbor's radishes. "These were no ordinary radishes, this was no ordinary woman." And then again, "This was no ordinary woman."

Madeleine George is to be commended for a searing play that presents fat (and skinny) women as raging, passionate, struggling, and possibly, together, triumphing. The talent of this young playwright is formidable, and though *The Most Massive Woman Wins* didn't deal with dykes, I suspect it's only a matter of time... ✨