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Androgyny

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To be a woman means to be strong; to be weak;
to be playful; to be serious;
to be tough; to be nurturing.

To be a woman means to never be enough.

It's not enough to play baseball,
to pirouette the fastest,
to read the most books,
to play marbles in the dirt,
to build model airplanes and cars.

A woman must wear lacy dresses,
must cake on makeup and lipstick,
must stand, sit, and walk just so,
must be refined,
and cook, always, from scratch,
and keep, always, the babies clean,
and smile, always smile.

She must not wear pants and T-shirts;
only boys wear pants and T-shirts.

A girl is not a boy.

She must not laugh so loud.

She must not giggle or be silly.

That's what grown ups,
who have strong opinions, say.

Once, there was a woman
who was many people's ideal of femininity.
Sometimes, she wore a business suit;
other times, she wore jeans and a tailored shirt.
Still other times, she wore a formal gown;
sometimes she was scantily clad.

She was tough,
she was intelligent,
and she was beautiful.

She had strong ideas of what it means to be a woman.

She wrote books; she gave speeches.

She fought for women's right

to be whoever they wanted,

to do whatever they wanted.

Many women, like me, listened to her
and liked her.

Others disliked her.

They said her voice was too strong, too masculine.

They said she was strident... a complainer.

Still, she rose to advocate for women's rights.

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I stood with a crowd of others
in front of my favorite bookstore.
We waited to hear this woman
whose writing I had read,
whose voice I had heard,
speak.
She stepped out of a limo,
dressed in a simple blouse and skirt.
The wind blew her blonde, shoulder-length hair
across her face.
She laughed loud and free.
We heard this woman,
Gloria Steinem,
share her views on women's rights.
With every word, I stood taller and prouder
about being a woman.
The grown ups must have been wrong.

ON LOWER WACKER DRIVE, CHICAGO

Wilda Morris

See that grey-haired woman
huddled against the wall,
cheeks red and tough as leather,
natty grey scarf over her matted hair?

That coat looks thirty years old.
Who knows when those buttons
popped off? Those old grey sweat pants,
ragged at the bottom, stick out
under her old-fashioned skirt.
And those shoes! She's stuffed
newspapers in men's shoes
to make them fit and fill the holes.

Many of her teeth are rotted out.
She's half-blind without glasses
she can't afford. See how arthritis
has gnarled the fingers holding out
the cup for coins.

That's me as I might be
had my grandparents not taken us in,
Mother, Dorinda and I,
kept the monster beast of poverty
from striking its fist harder
into our bellies, beating us