from *milk and honey*
by rupi kaur

you tell me
i am not like most girls
and learn to kiss me with your eyes closed
something about the phrase—something about
how i have to be unlike the women
i call sisters in order to be wanted
makes me want to spit your tongue out
like i am supposed to be proud you picked me
as if i should be relieved you think
i am better than them
It was long ago  
By Eleanor Farjeon

I'll tell you, shall I, something I remember?  
Something that still means a great deal to me.  
It was long ago.

A dusty road in summer I remember,  
A mountain, and an old house, and a tree  
That stood, you know,

Behind the house. An old woman I remember  
In a red shawl with a grey cat on her knee  
Humming under a tree.

She seemed the oldest thing I can remember.  
But then perhaps I was not more than three.  
It was long ago.

I dragged on the dusty road, and I remember  
How the old woman looked over the fence at me  
And seemed to know

How it felt to be three, and called out, I remember  
“Do you like bilberries and cream for tea?”  
I went under the tree.
And while she hummed, and the cat purred, I remember
How she filled a saucer with berries and cream for me
So long ago.

Such berries and such cream as I remember
I never had seen before, and never see
Today, you know.

And that is almost all I can remember,
The house, the mountain, the gray cat on her knee,
Her red shawl, and the tree,

And while she hummed, and the cat purred, I remember
How she filled a saucer with berries and cream for me
So long ago.

Such berries and such cream as I remember
I never had seen before, and never see
Today, you know.

And that is almost all I can remember,
The house, the mountain, the gray cat on her knee,
Her red shawl, and the tree,

And the taste of the berries, the feel of the sun I remember
And the smell of everything that used to be
So long ago,

Till the heat on the road outside again I remember
And how the long dusty road seemed to have for me
No end, you know.

That is the farthest thing I can remember.
It won’t mean much to you. It does to me.
Then I grew up, you see.
'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you - and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal - as we are!' 'As we are!' repeated Mr Rochester - 'so,' he added, enclosing me in his arms, gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: 'so, Jane!' 'Yes, so, sir,' I rejoined: 'and yet not so; for you are a married man - or as good as a married man, and wed to one inferior to you - to one with whom you have no sympathy - whom I do not believe you truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union: therefore I am better than you - let me go!'
from Maya Angelou

I am grateful to be a woman. I must have done something great in another life.
from Emma Watson at a press conference, July 2011

I think women are scared of feeling powerful and strong and brave sometimes. There’s nothing wrong with being afraid. It’s not the absence of fear, it’s overcoming it and sometimes you just have to blast through and have faith.
Green, Green is My Sister’s House (from A Thousand Mornings)  
by Mary Oliver

Don’t you dare climb that tree  
or even try, they said, or you will be  
sent away to the hospital of the  
very foolish, if not the other one.  
And I suppose, considering my age,  
it was fair advice.

But the tree is a sister to me, she  
lives alone in a green cottage  
high in the air and I know what  
would happen, she’d clap her green hands,  
she’d shake her green hair, she’d  
welcome me. Truly.

I try to be good but sometimes  
a person just has to break out and  
act like the wild and springy thing  
one used to be. It’s impossible not  
to remember wild and not want to go back. So  
if someday you can’t find me you might  
look into that tree or – of course  
it’s possible – under it.
from *Women, Race and Class*,
*a study of the women’s liberation movement in the US*
By Angela Davis

"Expediency governed the slaveholders’ posture toward female slaves: when it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles. [...] During the decades preceding the Civil War, Black women came to be increasingly appraised for their fertility (or for the lack of it): she who was potentially the mother of ten, twelve, fourteen or more became a coveted treasure indeed. This did not mean, however, that as mothers, Black women enjoyed a more respected status than they enjoyed as workers. Ideological exaltation of motherhood - as popular as it was during the nineteenth century - did not extend to slaves. In fact, in the eyes of the slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force. They were "breeders" - animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers."
from *milk and honey*  
by rupi kaur

the name kaur  
makes me a free woman  
it removes the shackles that  
try to bind me  
uplifts me  
to remind me i am equal to  
any man even though the state  
of this world screams to me i am not  
that i am my own woman and  
i belong wholly to myself

and the universe  
it humbles me  
calls out and says i have a  
universal duty to share with  
humanity to nurture  
and serve the sisterhood  
to raise those that need raising  
the name kaur runs in my blood  
it was in me before the word itself existed  
it is my identity and my liberation  
-kaur  
a woman of sikh
Atlas (from Safe as Houses)
By U.A. Fanthorpe

There is a kind of love called maintenance
Which stores the WD40 and knows when to use it;

Which checks the insurance, and doesn’t forget
The milkman; which remembers to plant bulbs;

Which answers letters; which knows the way
The money goes; which deals with dentists

And Road Fund Tax and meeting trains,
And postcards to the lonely; which upholds

The permanently rickety elaborate
Structures of living, which is Atlas.

And maintenance is the sensible side of love,
Which knows what time and weather are doing
To my brickwork; insulates my faulty wiring;
Laughs at my dryrotten jokes; remembers
My need for gloss and grouting; which keeps
My suspect edifice upright in air,
As Atlas did the sky.

@thereaderorg
#SharedReading
In every good marriage, it helps sometimes to be a little deaf. I have followed that advice [given by her mother-in-law on her wedding day] assiduously, and not only at home through 56 years of a marital relationship nonpareil. I have employed it as well in every workplace, including the Supreme Court. When a thoughtless or unkind word is spoken, best tune out. Reacting in anger or annoyance will not advance one's ability to persuade.
He went forward and stretched out his arm again. Bathsheba had overtaken him at a point beside which stood a low stunted holly bush, now laden with red berries. Seeing his advance take the form of an attitude threatening a possible enclosure, if not compression, of her person, she edged off round the bus.

'Why, Farmer Oak,' she said over the top, looking at him with rounded eyes, 'I never said I was going to marry you.'

'Well - that is a tale!' said Oak, with dismay. 'To run after anybody like this, and then say you don't want him!'
from *Far From the Madding Crowd* (ch 4, in *A Little Aloud with Love*)
By Thomas Hardy

'What I meant to tell you was only this,' she said eagerly, and yet half conscious of the absurdity of the position she had made for herself - 'that nobody has got me yet as a sweetheart, instead of my having a dozen, as my aunt said; I hate to be thought men’s property in that way, though possibly I shall be had some day. Why, if I'd wanted you I shouldn't have run after you like this; 'twould have been the forwardest thing! But there was no harm in hurrying to correct a piece of false news that had been told you.'

'Oh, no - no harm at all.' But there is such a thing as being too generous in expressing a judgement impulsively, and Oak added with a more appreciative sense of all the circumstances - 'Well, I am not quite certain it was no harm.'
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

My grandmas are officially old now
94 and 86
They tell me war was not romantic, not a bit,
don’t believe the posters of the handsome soldiers
kissing loved who waited for them to come back
Most endings were not like that
Most loved ones died or loves burnt out
My grandmas go to more funerals than parties now It hurts
Neither of them like this
And they sit
Observing everything
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

Their Christmas’s as kids had sock stockings and a single bouncy ball and now I watch them watching as great grandchildren open hoards of presents throwing half onto the floor
Sometimes we disagree with what’s right and wrong for us to do
My pregnancy without a wedding ring was something that we struggled through
Talked it through and agreed to disagree
And though I felt a little shamed
When she offered me her ring to wear I knew she was just protecting me
From how people would’ve been to her if she had done the same
The other took me to the side and held my waist tight like a glove
“Loads of my generation got knocked up too” she whispered
“They just kept it covered up And married bloody quickly”
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

I love it when she winks at me
Telling secrets,
Drinking tea
I ask about their history
They know a lot of things my grans
They sit and watch it all
Articulate, intelligent
Kind and bossy,
Sly sometimes
As clocks tick time with icing topped
And I watch as people stop to ask them if they want another cup of tea
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

“Ten thousand and eighty three I’ve had” she jokes to me
They all taste just the bloody same
She says “I’m bored of my friends dying”
And people are so patronizing
Bending over, talking shyly,
Slowly and politely like my grandmas are both kids
Telling me to “leave nan” she’s just nattering for the sake of it
Call their conversations gossip
Like older people are all the same
And ignore everything they thought before their brown hairs turned to silver grey
“If you ever call it lilac I will slap your little face” she says
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

She says
She wishes she could dance again
But I see her dancing all the time
And I love the fact me and my mum’s mum tell dirty jokes my mum won’t like
We watch reruns of CSI
The oldest says she’s ready to die
Her younger siblings are all gone now
Funerals a daily song, now
The tea is sipped
My daughter loves the way they live
Bungalows and secret tins of biscuits
She nicks while my grandma sleeps
Bungalows and Biscuit Tins
by Hollie McNish

My youngest grandma does ‘chairobics’ for the over eighties twice a week
And lives a larger life than most people my age that I meet
I see life-lines run through both their faces,
Both of them my saving graces,
I think our country’s strongly ageist
I wish more grandmas filled the pages of our youth-obsessing TV screens
You teach me what real wisdom means
And though there’s things we argue on
And your mindsets can be militant
And you always say I swear too much
I think you’re fucking brilliant.
My Mother Goes to Vote
By Judith Harris

We walked five blocks to the elementary school, my mother’s high heels crunching through playground gravel. We entered through a side door.

Down the long corridor, decorated with Halloween masks, health department safety posters—we followed the arrows to the third grade classroom.

My mother stepped alone into the booth, pulling the curtain behind her. I could see only the backs of her calves in crinkled nylons.

A partial vanishing, then reappearing pocketbook crooked on her elbow, our mayor’s button pinned to her lapel. Even then I could see—to choose is to follow what has already been decided.
My Mother Goes to Vote
By Judith Harris

We marched back out
finding a new way back down streets
named for flowers
and accomplished men.
I said their names out loud, as we found
our way home, to the cramped house,
the devoted porch light left on,
the customary meatloaf.
I remember, in the classroom converted
into a voting place—

there were two mothers, conversing,
squeezed into the children’s desk chairs.
from Simone de Beauvoir

To be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future.
Height
by Ann Morrow Lindberg

When I was young I felt so small
And frightened, for the world was tall.

And even grasses seemed to me
A forest of immensity,

Until I learned that I could grow
A glance would leave them far below.

Spanning a tree's height with my eye,
Suddenly I soared as high;

And fixing on a star I grew,
I pushed my head against the blue!

Still, like a singing lark, I find
Rapture to leave the grass behind.

And sometimes standing in a crowd
My lips are cool against a cloud.
My Winged Soul
by Emily Pfeiffer

My soul is like some cage-born bird, that hath
A restless prescience—howsoever won—
Of a broad pathway leading to the sun,
With promptings of an oft reprovèd faith
In sun-ward yearnings. Stricken through her breast,
And faint her wing with beating at the bars
Of sense, she looks beyond outlying stars,
And only in the Infinite sees rest.

Sad soul! If ever thy desire be bent
Or broken to thy doom, and made to share
The ruminant’s beatitude,—content,—
Chewing the cud of knowledge, with no care
For germs of life within; then will I say,
Thou art not caged, but fitly stalled in clay!
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.
Any action a woman engages in from a spirit of joy, and within a similarly safe and joyous environment, falls within the city-walls of feminism. A girl has a right to dance how she wants, when her favourite record comes on.
I saw a desert and I saw a woman coming out of it. And she came to the bank of a dark river, and the bank was steep and high. And on it an old man met her, who had a long white beard, and a stick that curled was in his hand, and on it was written Reason. And he asked her what it was she wanted; and she said, “I am woman, and I am seeking for the land of Freedom.”

And he said, “It is before you.”

And she said, “I see nothing before me but a dark flowing river, and a bank steep and high, and cuttings here and there with heavy sand in them.”

And he said, “And beyond that?”

She said, “I see nothing, but sometimes, when I shade my eyes with my hand, I think I see on the further bank trees and hills, and the sun shining on them!”
He said, “That is the Land of Freedom.”
She said, “How am I to get there?”
He said, “There is one way, and one only. Down the banks of Labor, through the water of Suffering. There is no other.”
She said “Is there no bridge?”
He answered, “None.”
She said, “Is the water deep?”
He said, “Deep.”
She said, “Is the floor worn?”
He said, “It is. Your foot may slip at any time, and you may be lost.”
She said, “Have any crossed already?”
He said, “Some have tried!”
from Three Dreams in a Desert (Dreams, 1890) By Olive Schreiner

She said, “Is there a track to show where the best fording is?”
He said, “It has to be made.”
She shaded her eyes with her hand; and she said, “I will go.”

[...]

[The woman has been carrying a tiny child at her breast, and is instructed by the old man to put him down so that he can grow and find the Land of Freedom for himself. The child bites her when she tries to release him, and as the woman puts him down on the ground she suddenly changes from youth to age.]
And she stood far off on the bank of the river. And she said, “For what do I go to this far land which no one has ever reached? Oh, I am alone! I am utterly alone!”
And Reason, that old man, said to her, “Silence! what do you hear?”
And she listened intently, and she said, “I hear the sound of feet, a thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, and they beat this way!”
He said, “They are the feet of those that shall follow you. Lead on!”
from Coretta Scott King (wife of Martin Luther King)

Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.
The Book of Ruth and Naomi (from A Little Aloud with Love)
by Marge Piercy

When you pick up the Tanakh and read the Book of Ruth, it is a shock how little it resembles memory. It's concerned with inheritance, lands, men's names, how women must wiggle and wobble to live.

Yet women have kept it dear for the beloved elder who cherished Ruth, more friend than daughter. Daughters leave. Ruth brought even the baby she made with Boaz home as a gift.

Where you go, I will go too, your people shall be my people, I will be a Jew for you, for what is yours I will love as I love you, oh Naomi my mother, my sister, my heart.
The Book of Ruth and Naomi (from A Little Aloud with Love) by Marge Piercy

Show me a woman who does not dream a double, heart’s twin, a sister of the mind in whose ear she can whisper, whose hair she can braid as her life twists its pleasure and pain and shame. Show me a woman who does not hide in the locket of bone that deep eye beam of fiercely gentle love she had once from mother, daughter, sister; once like a warm moon that radiance aligned the tides of her blood into potent order.

At the season of first fruits, we recall two travellers, co-conspirators, scavengers making do with leftovers and mill ends, whose friendship was stronger than fear, stronger than hunger, who walked together, the road of shards, hands joined.
We Talked as Girls Do
by Emily Dickinson

We talked as Girls do –
Fond, and late –
We speculated fair, on every subject, but the Grave –
Of ours, none affair –

We handled Destinies, as cool –
As we – Disposers – be –
And God, a Quiet Party
To our Authority –

But fondest, dwelt upon Ourself
As we eventual – be –
When Girls to Women, softly raised
We – occupy – Degree –

We parted with a contract
To cherish, and to write
But Heaven made both, impossible
Before another night.
The House
by Warsan Shire

I
Mother says there are locked rooms inside all women,
kitchen of lust, bedroom of grief, bathroom of apathy.
Sometimes the men they come with keys,
and sometimes the men they come with hammers.

II
Nin soo joog laga waayo, soo jiifso aa laga helaa,
I said Stop, I said No and he did not listen.
The House
by Warsan Shire

III
Perhaps Rihanna has a plan, perhaps she takes Chris back to hers
only for him to wake up hours later in a bathtub full of ice,
with a dry mouth, looking down at his new, neat procedure.

IV
I point to my body and say Oh this old thing? No, I just slipped it on.

V
Are you going to eat that? I say to my mother, pointing to my father who is lying on the
dining room table, his mouth stuffed with a red apple.
The bigger my body is, the more locked rooms there are, the more men come with keys. Anwar didn’t push it all the way in, I still think about what he could have opened up inside of me. Basil came and hesitated at the door for three years. Johnny with the blue eyes came with a bag of tools he had used on other women: one hairpin, a bottle of bleach, a switchblade and a jar of Vaseline. Yusuf called out God’s name through the keyhole and no one answered. Some begged, some climbed the side of my body looking for a window, some said they were on their way and did not come.
The House
by Warsan Shire

VII.
Show us on the doll where you were touched, they said.
I said I don’t look like a doll, I look like a house.
They said Show us on the house.

Like this: two fingers in the jam jar
Like this: an elbow in the bathwater
Like this: a hand in the drawer.
The House
by Warsan Shire

VIII
I should tell you about my first love who found a trapdoor under my left breast nine years ago, fell in and hasn’t been seen since. Every now and then I feel something crawling up my thigh. He should make himself known, I’d probably let him out. I hope he hasn’t bumped in to the others, the missing boys from small towns, with pleasant mothers, who did bad things and got lost in the maze of my hair. I treat them well enough, a slice of bread, if they’re lucky a piece of fruit. Except for Johnny with the blue eyes, who picked my locks and crawled in. Silly boy, chained to the basement of my fears, I play music to drown him out.
IX
Knock knock.
Who’s there?
No one.

X
At parties I point to my body and say This is where love comes to die. Welcome, come in, make yourself at home. Everyone laughs, they think I’m joking.
from *The Princess Saves Herself in This One*
by Amanda Lovelace

it is strange
how
sisters
can
be
saviors
or
strangers
&
sometimes
a bit of both.
from **Homestead** (chapter 12, in *A Little Aloud with Love*)  
By Rosina Lippi

Laura held out her hands to show her daughter the tadpole: a gift, a vision. Annile wanted to drink from her cupped palms.  
'No, he'll jump out,' Laura said, but she tilted her hands toward the small red mouth. The tadpole leapt frantically, striking the startled child in the cheek, and fell back into the spring.  
The water rippled and danced; Laura saw her reflection shift. She looked into the water and watched it draw the picture of a younger woman, a woman in a dark green dress edged with white lace at the throat, her hair long and glossy and well kept, her hands smooth and white, her nails clean and even.  
'Who's that?' her daughter asked, following her mother's gaze, wanting to play this old game, to hear her mother's dreams.  
'Why, that's a young woman I know,' Laura answered. 'A teacher.'  
'Tell me about her, Mama.'
from Homestead (chapter 12, in A Little Aloud with Love)
By Rosini Lippi

She pulled the child up closer to her on the log, cast an eye at the baby digging in the mud. 'Well, let's see. She's just started teaching. She found a little apartment all to herself with a view of the Three Sisters, way off. Sometimes she just reads away the evenings in a big comfortable chair. She likes to sew, she sewed a dress to wear to a dance. Her beau comes on Friday nights in a dark gray suit and sometimes they go out to eat. Once in a while she takes a trip. Greece, to swim in the sea.'
Annile thought for a good time.
'Have you ever been there?'
'No, I haven't. Bought a book about Greece, though. I gave it to your great-great-aunt Johanna when I was a girl.'
'Is the teacher lady you?'
Laura stroked the child's hair away from her face and looked back into the depths of the spring.
'No, that was never me. But maybe it'll be you, sometime. Maybe you can take up where your great-aunt Martha left off. She was a fine teacher.'
A Birthday (taken from A Little Aloud with Love)
by Christina Rossetti

My heart is like a singing bird
    Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
    Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
    That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these,
    Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
    Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
    And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
    In leaves and silver fleurs-de-llys;
Because the birthday of my life
    Is come, my love is come to me.
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go.
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.
Warning
by Jenny Joseph

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.
This I remember:
Mother always said
sing child sing
make a song
and sing
beat out your own rhythms
the rhythms of your life
but make the song soulful
and make life
sing

Sing daughter sing
around you are
uncountable tunes
some sung
others unsung
sing them
to your rhythms
observe
listen
absorb
soak yourself
bathe
in the stream of life
and then sing

sing
simple songs
for the people
for all to hear
and learn
and sing
with you

from *Where Are Those Songs?*
by Micere Githae Mugo
The Crazy Woman
by Gwendolyn Brooks

I shall not sing a May song.
A May song should be gay.
I'll wait until November
And sing a song of gray.

I'll wait until November
That is the time for me.
I'll go out in the frosty dark
And sing most terribly.

And all the little people
Will stare at me and say,
"That is the Crazy Woman
Who would not sing in May."
from Amal Clooney

in a speech given at the Texas Conference for Women

The worst thing that we can do as women is not stand up for each other, and this is something we can practice every day, no matter where we are and what we do – women sticking up for other women, choosing to protect and celebrate each other instead of competing or criticizing one another.
from Adrienne Rich

When a woman tells the truth she is creating the possibility for more truth around her.
A voice is a human gift; it should be cherished and used, to utter fully human speech as possible. Powerlessness and silence go together.
For a Five Year Old
by Fleur Adcock

A snail is climbing up the window-sill
Into your room, after a night of rain.
You call me in to see, and I explain
That it would be unkind to leave it there:
It might crawl to the floor; we must take care
That no one squashes it. You understand,
And carry it outside, with a careful hand,
To eat a daffodil.

I see, then, that a kind of faith prevails:
Your gentleness is moulded still by words
From me, who have trapped mice and shot wild birds,
From me, who drowned your kittens, who betrayed
Your closest relatives, who purveyed
The harshest kind of truth to many another.
But that is how things are: I am your mother,
And we are kind to snails.
She held one up, twirling it in her hand as if to show me how the world began and ended in perfection. I was stunned. How could she make a rose so woebegone, couldn’t silk stand stiff? And how could a child, otherwise convinced of her mother’s taste, know what to think? It’s overblown, she smiled, I love roses when they’re past their best.

‘Overblown roses’, the words swam in my head, making sense as I suddenly saw afresh the rose now, the rose ahead: where a petal clings to a last breath; where my mother’s flesh and mine, going the same way, may still be seen as beautiful, if these words are said.
from *When I Hit You*
By Meena Kandasamy

I am the woman who is willing to display her scars and put them within exhibition frames. I am the madwoman of moon days. I am the breast-beating woman who howls. I am the woman who wills the skies to weep in my place.
from *The Summer Before the Dark*
By Doris Lessing

“I’m not going to be like my mother. You’re maniacs. You’re mad.”

“Yes,” said Kate. “I know it. And so you won’t be. The best of luck to you. And what are you going to be instead?”
Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this: 'You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself — educating your own judgements. Those that stay must remember, always, and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society.
from the essay *We Should All Be Feminists*
By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations.
from *The Well of Loneliness*, chapter 27
By Radclyffe Hall

Puddle put an arm around Stephen's bowed shoulders, and she said: "You've got work to do - come and do it! Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you've got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight - write both men and women from a personal knowledge. Nothing's completely misplaced or wasted, I'm sure of that - and we're all part of nature. Some day the world will recognize this, but meanwhile there's plenty of work that's waiting. For the sake of all the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it's up to you to have the courage to make good, and I'm here to help you do it, Stephen."
from Madeleine Albright
(the first woman to have become the US Secretary of State)

It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.
The Admiral [...] now came up to Captain Wentworth, and without any observation of what he might be interrupting, thinking only of his own thoughts, began with - "If you had been a week later at Lisbon, last spring, Frederick, you would have been asked to give a passage to Lady Mary Grierson and her daughters." "Should I? I am glad I was not a week later then."

The admiral abused him for his want of gallantry. He defended himself: though professing that he would never willingly admit any ladies on board a ship of his, excepting for a ball, or a visit, which a few hours might comprehend.

"But, if I know myself," said he, "this is from no want of gallantry towards them. It is rather from feeling how impossible it is, with all one's efforts, and all one's sacrifices, to make the accommodations on board such as women ought to have. There can be no want of gallantry, Admiral, in rating the claims of women to every personal comfort high, and this is what I do. I hate to hear of women on board, or to see them on board; and no ship, under my command, shall ever convey a family of ladies any where, if I can help it."
This brought his sister upon him.
"Oh! Frederick! But I cannot believe it of you. - All idle refinement! - Women may be as comfortable on board, as in the best house in England. I believe I have lived as much on board as most women, and I know nothing superior to the accommodations of a man-of-war. I declare I have not a comfort or an indulgence about me, even at Kellynch Hall," (with a kind bow to Anne) "beyond what I always had in most of the ships I have lived in; and they have been five altogether."
"Nothing to the purpose," replied her brother. "You were living with your husband, and were the only woman on board."
"But you, yourself, brought Mrs. Harville, her sister, her cousin, and the three children, round from Portsmouth to Plymouth. Where was this superfine, extraordinary sort of gallantry of yours then?"
"All merged in my friendship, Sophia. I would assist any brother-officer's wife that I could, and I would bring any thing of Harville's from the world's end, if he wanted it. But do not imagine that I did not feel it an evil in itself."
from **Persuasion**, chapter 8  
By Jane Austen

"Depend upon it, they were all perfectly comfortable."
"I might not like them the better for that, perhaps. Such a number of women and children have no right to be comfortable on board."
"My dear Frederick, you are talking quite idly. Pray, what would become of us poor sailors' wives, who often want to be conveyed to one port or another, after our husbands, if every body had your feelings?"
"My feelings, you see, did not prevent my taking Mrs. Harville and all her family to Plymouth."
"But I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days."
from *The Bell Jar*
By Sylvia Plath

That’s one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket.
Dear Mr Radziewicz, I can imagine myself blurbing a book in which Brian Aldiss, predictably, sneers at my work, because then I could preen myself on magnanimity. But I cannot imagine myself blurbing a book, the first of a new series and hence presumably exemplary of the series, which not only contains no writing by women, but the tone of which is so self-contentedly, exclusively male, like a club, or a locker room. That would not be magnanimity, but foolishness. Gentlemen, I just don't belong here.

Yours truly, Ursula K. Le Guin
Men make the moral code and they expect women to accept it. They have decided that it is entirely right and proper for men to fight for their liberties and their rights, but that it is not right and proper for women to fight for theirs.
from Astrid Lindgren
in a speech made in 1958

A child alone with her book creates, somewhere in the secret room of her soul, her own pictures that surpass everything else. Human beings must have these pictures. The day when children's imaginations can no longer make them will be a day when all of humanity is impoverished. All of the great things that have happened in the world happened first in someone's imagination, and the shape of tomorrow depends largely upon the power of the imagination in those who are just now learning to read. This is why children must have books.
New Season
by Wendy Cope

No coats today. Buds bulge on chestnut trees,
And on the doorstep of a big, old house
A young man stands and plays his flute.

I watch the silver notes fly up
And circle in the blue sky above the traffic,
Travelling where they will.

And suddenly this paving-stone
Midway between my front door and the bus stop
Is a starting point.

From here I can go anywhere I choose.
In my younger days, when I was pained by half-educated, loose, and inaccurate ways which we all had, I used to say, 'How much women need exact science.' But since I have known some workers in science who were not always true to the teaching of nature, who have loved Self more than science, I have said, 'How much science needs women!'
from Mykel Sisk (NexGeneGirls intern)

The most important thing I learned is that a scientist can look just like me.
Dear brothers and sisters, do remember one thing: Malala Day is not my day. Today is the day of every woman, every boy and every girl who have raised their voice for their rights.

There are hundreds of human rights activists and social workers who are not only speaking for their rights, but who are struggling to achieve their goal of peace, education and equality. Thousands of people have been killed by the terrorists and millions have been injured. I am just one of them.

So here I stand. So here I stand, one girl, among many. I speak not for myself, but so those without a voice can be heard.

[...]

There was a time when women activists asked men to stand up for their rights. But this time we will do it by ourselves. I am not telling men to step away from speaking for women’s rights, but I am focusing on women to be independent and fight for themselves. So dear sisters and brothers, now it’s time to speak up.
from The Diary of a Young Girl
By Anne Frank

Women should be respected as well! Generally speaking, men are held in great esteem in all parts of the world, so why shouldn’t women have their share? Soldiers and war heroes are honored and commemorated, explorers are granted immortal fame, martyrs are revered, but how many people look upon women too as soldiers? … Women, who struggle and suffer pain to ensure the continuation of the human race, make much tougher and more courageous soldiers than all those big-mouthed freedom-fighting heroes put together!
from **Serena Williams**
in an open letter ‘to all incredible women who strive for excellence’

But as we know, too often women are not supported enough or are discouraged from choosing their path. I hope together we can change that. For me, it was a question of resilience. What others marked as flaws or disadvantages about myself – my race, my gender – I embraced as fuel for my success. I never let anything or anyone define me or my potential. I controlled my future.

[...]

As we know, women have to break down many barriers on the road to success. One of those barriers is the way we are constantly reminded we are not men, as if it is a flaw. People call me one of the “world’s greatest female athletes”. Do they say LeBron is one of the world’s best male athletes? Is Tiger? Federer? Why not? They are certainly not female. We should never let this go unchallenged. We should always be judged by our achievements, not by our gender.
from Hilary Clinton
in her 2016 concession speech

To all the little girls who are watching, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.
Phenomenal Woman
by Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size.
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms.
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.
Phenomenal Woman
by Maya Angelou

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed,
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.
from the novel *Swing Time*
By Zadie Smith

‘for any daughter of hers was to do more than just survive – as my mother had – she was to thrive, learning many unnecessary skills, like tap dancing.’
Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes. Now and again an Emily Brontë or a Robert Burns blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter’s night.
Resumé
by Emmeline Pankhurst

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live.
from *The Cushion in the Road* (2013)
By Alice Walker

Poetry is the lifeblood of rebellion, revolution and the raising of consciousness.
Still I Rise
by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.
Still I Rise
by Maya Angelou

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.
Now
by Audre Lorde.

Woman power
is
Black power
is
Human power
is
always feeling
my heart beats
as my eyes open
as my hands move
as my mouth speaks

I am
are you

Ready.
from Jeanette Winterson
in an interview given in 1994

Art can make a difference, because it pulls people up short. It says, don’t accept things for their face value; you don’t have to go along with any of this; you can think for yourself. It gives you a kind of self-reliance. We all feel powerless and we can’t really manage to do anything because there’s just so much. I want to try and cut through those feelings of apathy and powerlessness and be a kind of rallying point, offer a rallying cry, to people who would otherwise feel dispossessed.
No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow and be perceived as fully blossomed as you were intended. Or who belittles in any fashion the gifts you labor so to bring into the world. That is why historians are generally enemies of women, certainly of blacks, and so are, all too often, the very people we must sit under in order to learn.
from Marie Curie
in a letter to her brother, written in 1894

We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.
from *I Love Dick*
By Chris Kraus

I'm moved in writing to be irrepressible [...] I think the sheer fact of women talking, being paradoxical, inexplicable, flip, self-destructive but above all else *public* is the most revolutionary thing in the world.
“She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order.”
from *Enheduanna* (the world’s earliest known poet)

"Funeral offerings were brought, as if I had never lived there.
I approached the light, but the light scorched me
I approached the shade, but I was covered with a storm.
My honeyed mouth became scummed. Tell An about Lugal-Ane and my fate!
May An undo it for me! As soon as you tell An about it, An will release me."
Last night I wept. I wept because the process by which I have become a woman was painful. I wept because I was no longer a child with a child’s blind faith. I wept because my eyes were opened to reality … I wept because I could not believe anymore and I love to believe. I can still love passionately without believing. That means I love humanly. I wept because from now on I will weep less. I wept because I have lost my pain and I am not yet accustomed to its absence.
from the novel *Kitchen*
By Banana Yoshimoto

As I grow older, much older, I will experience many things, and I will hit rock bottom. Again and again I will suffer; again and again I will get back on my feet. I will not be defeated. I won’t let my spirit be destroyed.
from *Moominsummer Madness*
By Tove Jansson

There’s no need to imagine that you’re a wondrous beauty, because that’s what you are.
from *Men Explain Things to Me*
By Rebecca Solnit

Some women get erased a little at a time, some all at once. Some reappear. Every woman who appears wrestles with the forces that would have her disappear. She struggles with the forces that would tell her story for her, or write her out of the story, the genealogy, the rights of man, the rule of law. The ability to tell your own story, in words or images, is already a victory, already a revolt.
from Ruth Gordon

Courage is like a muscle; it is strengthened by use.
from Alice Walker

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.
from Rosa Parks

I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.
from Songs Out of Sorrow, part 2, 'Mastery'
by Sara Teasdale

I would not have a god come in
To shield me suddenly from sin,
And set my house of life to rights;
Nor angels with bright burning wings
Ordering my earthly thoughts and things;
Rather my own frail guttering lights
Wind blown and nearly beaten out;
Rather the terror of the nights
And long, sick groping after doubt;
Rather be lost than let my soul
Slip vaguely from my own control --
Of my own spirit let me be
In sole though feeble mastery.
from *Little Women*, chapter 44
By Louisa May Alcott

[on being recently married to Laurie]
Amy - "I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship."

[...]
"What are you going to do with yourselves after you get settled?" asked Jo, buttoning Amy's cloak as she used to button her pinafores.
"We have our plans. We don't mean to say much about them yet, because we are such very new brooms, but we don't intend to be idle. I'm going into business with a devotion that shall delight Grandfather, and prove to him that I'm not spoiled. I need something of the sort to keep me steady. I'm tired of dawdling, and mean to work like a man."
"And Amy, what is she going to do?" asked Mrs March, well pleased at Laurie's decision and the energy with which he spoke.
"After doing the civil all round, and airing our best bonnet, we shall astonish you by the elegant hospitalities of our mansion, the brilliant society we shall draw about us, and the beneficial influence we shall exert over the world at large. That's about it, isn't it, Madame Recamier?" asked Laurie with a quizzical look at Amy. "Time will show. Come away, Impertinence, and don't shock my family by calling me names before their faces," answered Amy, resolving that there should be a home with a good wife in it before she set up a salon as a queen of society.
from Alison Bechdel (cartoonist) in an interview with Jan Sorensen in 2013

[on publishing her comic strip without her mother’s approval]
It certainly was an important moment for me, that realization that I was not going to get what I wanted. It was very freeing. I keep using that word “freeing” or “liberating.” I feel like Houdini sometimes, like I’m just getting out of one set of shackles after another, hanging upside down inside a burlap bag with handcuffs on. Hopefully one day, I’m going to get out of this tank of water.
My Mother’s Kitchen
by Choman Hardi

I will inherit my mother’s kitchen, her glasses, some tall and lean others short and fat her plates, an ugly collection from various sets, cups bought in a rush on different occasions rusty pots she doesn’t throw away. “Don’t buy anything just yet”, she says, “soon all of this will be yours”.

My mother is planning another escape for the first time home is her destination, the rebuilt house which she will furnish. At 69 she is excited about starting from a scratch. It is her ninth time.
My Mother’s Kitchen
by Choman Hardi

She never talks about her lost furniture
when she kept leaving her homes behind.
She never feels regret for things
only her vine in the front garden
which spread over the trellis on the porch.
She used to sing for the grapes to ripen,
sew cotton bags to protect them from the bees.
I will never inherit my mother’s trees.
Feminism is not about equality, and certainly not about silently slipping into a world of work created by and for men. Feminism, at its best, is a movement that works to liberate all people who have been economically, socially and culturally marginalized by an ideological system that has been designed for them to fail.
from *Wars I Have Seen* (1945)  
by Gertrude Stein

It is funny that men who are supposed to be scientific cannot get themselves to realise the basic principle of physics, that action and reaction are equal and opposite, that when you persecute people you always rouse them to be strong and stronger.
from *Middlemarch*
by George Eliot

But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.
She had the swagger of a girl. She blushed like a boy. She had a girl's toughness. She has a boy's gentleness. She was as meaty as a girl. She was as graceful as a boy. She was as brave and handsome and rough as a girl. She was as pretty and delicate and dainty as a boy. She turned boys' heads like a girl. She turned girls' heads like a boy. She made love like a boy. She made love like a girl. She was so boyish it was girlish, so girlish it was boyish, she made me want to rove the world writing our names on every tree. I had simply never found someone so right. Sometimes this shocked me so much that I was unable to speak.
Her
by Jackie Kay

I had been told about her.
How she would always, always.
How she would never, never.
I'd watched and listened
but I still fell for her,
how she always, always.
How she never, never,

In the small brave night,
her lips, butterfly moments.
I tried to catch her and she laughed
a loud laugh that cracked me in two,
but then I had been told about her,
how she would always, always.
How she would never, never.

We two listened to the wind.
We two galloped a pace.
We two, up and away, away, away.
And now she's gone,
like she said she would go.
But then I had been told about her –
how she would always, always.
A man once asked me ... how I managed in my books to write such natural conversation between men when they were by themselves. Was I, by any chance, a member of a large, mixed family with a lot of male friends? I replied that, on the contrary, I was an only child and had practically never seen or spoken to any men of my own age till I was about twenty-five. "Well," said the man, "I shouldn't have expected a woman (meaning me) to have been able to make it so convincing." I replied that I had coped with this difficult problem by making my men talk, as far as possible, like ordinary human beings. This aspect of the matter seemed to surprise the other speaker; he said no more, but took it away to chew it over. One of these days it may quite likely occur to him that women, as well as men, when left to themselves, talk very much like human beings also.
from bell hooks

When anyone thinks a woman who serves “gives ‘cause that’s what mothers or real women do,” they deny her full humanity and thus fail to see the generosity inherent in her acts.
from Arundhati Roy
in a lecture given in acceptance of the Sydney Peace Prize

I must accept [the Sydney Peace Prize] as a literary prize that honours a writer for her writing, because contrary to the many virtues that are falsely attributed to me, I’m not an activist, nor the leader of any mass movement, and I’m certainly not the ‘voice of the voiceless’. (We know of course there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.) I am a writer who cannot claim to represent anybody but herself. 

[...]

On Peace:
The real tragedy is that most people in the world are trapped between the horror of a putative peace and the terror of war. Those are the two sheer cliffs we’re hemmed in by. The question is: How do we climb out of this crevasse? For those who are materially well-off, but morally uncomfortable, the first question you must ask yourself is do you really want to climb out of it? How far are you prepared to go? Has the crevasse become too comfortable?
If you really want to climb out, there’s good news and bad news. The good news is that the advance party began the climb some time ago. They’re already half way up. Thousands of activists across the world have been hard at work preparing footholds and securing the ropes to make it easier for the rest of us. There isn’t only one path up. There are hundreds of ways of doing it. There are hundreds of battles being fought around the world that need your skills, your minds, your resources. No battle is irrelevant. No victory is too small. The bad news is that colourful demonstrations, weekend marches and annual trips to the World Social Forum are not enough. There have to be targeted acts of real civil disobedience with real consequences.
from *To My Trans Sisters: an anthology of letters written by trans women* by Laverne Cox

We are not what other people say we are. We are who we know ourselves to be, and we are what we love. That’s okay.
from Audrey Hepburn

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.
from Eleanor Roosevelt

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.
from Simone de Beauvoir

The Point is not for women simply to take power out of men’s hands, since that wouldn’t change anything about the world. It’s a question precisely of destroying that notion of power.
You don't have to be pretty. You don't owe prettiness to anyone. Not to your boyfriend/spouse/partner, not to your co-workers, especially not to random men on the street. You don't owe it to your mother, you don't owe it to your children, you don't owe it to civilization in general. Prettiness is not a rent you pay for occupying a space marked 'female'.
from *Anthony and Cleopatra*  
(Act II, Scene ii)  
by William Shakespeare

Enobarbus describes Queen Cleopatra:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
> Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;  
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
> The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,  
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
> The water which they beat to follow faster,  
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,

> It beggar'd all description: she did lie  
> In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,  
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see  
> The fancy outwork nature: on each side her  
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
> With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem  
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
> And what they undid did.
I took the red dress down and put it against myself. 'Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?' I said. That man told me so. He had found out that Sandi had been to the house and that I went to see him. I never knew who told. 'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother' he said to me.

'Oh put it away,' Grace Poole said, 'come and eat your food. Here's your grey wrapper. Why they can't give you anything better is more than I can understand. They're rich enough.'...But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now.
from Yoko Ono

I think that all women are witches, in the sense that a witch is a magical being. And a wizard, which is a male version of a witch, is kind of revered, and people respect wizards. But a witch, my god, we have to burn them. It’s the male chauvinistic society that we’re living in for the longest time, 3,000 years or whatever. And so I just wanted to point out the fact that men and women are magical beings. We are very blessed that way, so I’m just bringing that out. Don’t be scared of witches, because we are good witches, and you should appreciate our magical power.
from the novel *The Bricks that Built the Houses* by Kate Tempest

“She flicks her words like lit matches. They drop delicately, burning.”
from Anna Quindlen, writer of Lots of Candles, Plenty of Cake

After all those years as a woman hearing 'not thin enough, not pretty enough, not this enough, not that enough,' almost overnight I woke up one morning and thought, I AM ENOUGH.
from *The Princess Diarist*
by Carrie Fisher

Do not let what you think they think of you make you stop and question everything you are.
from *Women and Economics* (1898)
by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Quote 1: In our steady insistence on proclaiming sex-distinction we have grown to consider most human attributes as masculine attributes, for the simple reason that they were allowed for men and forbidden to women.

Quote 2: What we do modifies us more than what is done to us.
from The Sisters
by Judith Wright.

In the vine-shadows on the veranda;
under the yellow leaves, in the cooling sun,
sit two sisters. Their slow voices run
like little winter creeks, dwindled by frost and wind,
and the square of sunlight moves on the veranda.

They remember the gay young men on their tall horses
who came courting; the dancing and the smells of leather
and wine, the girls whispering by the fire together;
even their dolls and ponies, all they have left behind
moves in the yellow shadows on the veranda.
from The Sisters
by Judith Wright.

Thinking of their lives apart and the men they married thinking of the marriage-bed and the birth of their first child, they look down smiling. “My life was wide and wild, and who can know my heart? There in that golden jungle I walk alone,” say the old sisters on the veranda.
Our strategy is how we cope—how we measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom, daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person's skin, sex, or sexuality). We are women without a line. We are women who contradict each other.
from Won’t You Celebrate With Me
by Lucille Clifton

won’t you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my one hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.