

Bitter Tide

by Ann Bogle

I guess let's just talk about it: hope. I guess let's just think about it: money. I guess let's just cut up for an hour or two: nine laughs. Let's agonize about church issues. Let's counter violence with appetites. Let's charitably caretake Wagonmaster's appetite for violence. You spotted him twelve years later, over the phone. You declared you knew all about him, that I had a thing for bad guys, for the violent types. I chided you for not letting me in on your man knowledge, which you didn't. The girls/babes/chicks/shebas were violent themselves or countered none. One had been choked, and I acted like I didn't care. She had not cared when mine had pelted me with the words I had heard come from her, the c word, for one, which I now use about our down theres. My down there (pointing), a genuflection was it before. Now (thanks, gratefully, to Daphne Merken's recent writings about sex) I realize my life as a sexual beggar or beggar who is sexual has only just started. Men want to be paid, and since I didn't charge to now, they are my competition for getting paid; for me it's too late; for them it's just beginning ... the later-in-life male whores, the second act.

I was so steadfastly there, not charging, not nagging, not expecting, not asking, never needing to beg (paid by work), charitably giving out thoughts and words and listening to one at a time for two decades. Now I'm old. Men are just starting out on the path of the prostitute, the manly collection plate, to increase them, to buy them, to get one, to buy one and take one home, a divorce nuptial, their gaining a girl (again) or this time a hen with a little purse on a little strap or an industrial doctor's bag or a clicky set of equals [*squeels on her heels, vooz, twos, strues blue true coos, bazooms, shrooms, runes and stoons, stoon dones, les drones, peonies, ponies, phonies, cronies, bone monies, Shoney* (a euthanasia), *vroge heir*], King Care.

Ah so, so I look better than I aged. I'm not a cheap date, as I had

once made proud of being. I need steak or a doctor's drug to keep my weight from shredding. The Jews eat cattle but not pig; the Catholics eat a bone slice of Him. I try to talk with Him, but he's crowded by insiders. I was a loser. I mention it. I mention liking meals at chain diners as much as meals at good Italian restaurants. They were putting gas in a car when they fed me: men. Next they will be paid by jerking a guy/by rubbing a guy like a boss they haven't met, their new gal's ex-husband, that is hers by law, but no one views laws that way. The sign of the prostitute her diamond engagement ring. Gays' "marriage is love" intrigues the big guy upstairs. The gays all have good jobs.

I loved without marriage and the men loved without divorce and we loved a twenty-four-year-old eating and how gracious she shone over a tame bottle of beer, even smoking like Uma in the dance number, a bad girl, a girl to get you in trouble with her bad ass black manager of a dad's dad. So I'm broke, on public assistance, diagnosed, barely shouldering, barking and call on you cheated. Yours is yours, mine is mine until death makes its frenzied curtain call over my live womb, then my live breast, then my live neck, and live green eyes, and live midsection and live tail. Eighteen thousand was the most I ever earned in a year.

What did they want the fat ones for? Good mothers. For what did the fat ones pay at the office? I was thinking that the feminists pounding the city pavement had increased rent with every footstep, not that I was not one, but we had not earned our money at it or put our money together: "women" was too broad for our category. The fat women were coming to buy our men from us, without our sad work we put into it, without the love we showered on them, without the lost decisions we left up to them, practicing, always practicing for a bigger better day.

