

From that moment on, she disowned the child.

I was the child.

Educated in suitcases, lonely without maps, I pressed an ear to my diary in the nights, listened for the vague red stirrings of its heart.

I could feel without looking how one town became the next, slight shift up or down on the scale of chagrin. So this was civilization: running water and laws.

I was a saleswoman. Landladies liked me, though I talked about vacuum cleaners, left brochures in the cookie jars, gave supple demonstrations of equipment before dinner. I swept and I sold in the wrinkles of the heartland. I called it a good life.

There in the little towns darkness sighs away in the arms of each cricket. The mornings bring no new disaster. Night comes again. The rooming house creaks with longing for its own flustered century.

I'd pile my coins along the nightstand for counting. I'd make fragile plans for the life to come.

Really I thought nothing of the days that I'd passed through,
nothing of the nights that had passed over me.

I bound up my samples. The next house. The next house.

"Young ladies like you 'n them handy dandies, them sweepers, oughta head fer the tall times 'n the bold times of the City." That's what the farmers sometimes told me in the mornings when they pushed back their cap brims, made decisions about the sun. Haw de haw haw them tall times them bold times.

But I could see it. The City. A line in each road there. A guitar in each doorway. I learned that the blues is a bunch of fat people. I enrolled at a club for the timid. Yes that's how I came to the City. I was young.

I rented a cardboard room in the quiet zone.

Oh the tentative web of fashion spread its lace around my throat.

Every night I pulled out from under the bed the hat box I'd painted in animals. My finery! Black feathered hat. Stylish gloves small from washing. I'd hear the landlady shut the oven on her frozen dinner, watch the light of the teevee dance over the walls.

Outside the harsh things were fading along the Avenue. I called out "Carumba! Muchachos!" in the streets. Me without other words for uncertainty and joy.

Cynthia Carr

Cynthia Carr wrote articles for the Chicago daily newspapers for four years and was a member of the Lavender Woman collective. Her work appears in Amazon Quarterly's anthology, The Lesbian Reader.