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The Matron Cell

Wanda D. Ward[†]

PART I. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

We forthwith acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy, of the vigorous opposing views, even among physicians, and of the deep and seemingly absolute convictions that the subject inspires. . . . Our task, of course, is to resolve the issue by constitutional measurement, free of emotion and of predilection. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 116 (1973).

After it happened, I got fat. This wasn't the kind of surreptitious gain of maybe five or ten extra pounds that you notice one day when a pair of jeans says to you "no way no how are you fitting in here." This wasn't the result of months of overingestion, a year's worth of weekend binges, or a lifetime of bad habits. I wasn't simply "plump," "round," "voluptuous" or "large-boned." Although I hadn't been petite to begin with, in two and a half months I had gained more than thirty-five pounds. I was a mutant. I felt like someone had taken an airhose, shoved it into my mouth and flipped the switch. Everybody noticed. My mother couldn't stand it. The last thing she wanted was to wake up every day and see her bloated daughter, barely able to shove herself through the kitchen door.

One day, my uncle was helping the appliance guy move a refrigerator into our apartment. My mother, true to form, didn't just stand on the sidelines issuing firm but polite instructions, or play the amiable hostess making lemonade and serving cookies. No, she wrung her hands, she paced back and forth, she worried, she sweat, she fretted. Her agenda that day was to ensure that despite the enormity of the object being foisted upon our rented box of an apartment, not a scratch was going to blemish the walls. Never mind that the carpet was worn through like the fake grass of a miniature golf course, or that there was a strange weave of cracks making its way toward the ceiling—my mother knew responsibility, and here was her chance to give it its due. It would not have concerned her one bit if the men, nervous and sweating as much from her commands as from having to maneuver that gigantic thing through the narrow hallway, had suffered a coronary right there. (Although I could just imagine them falling crushed to the floor in a pathetic heap, a ghoulish assembly of legs and arms and heads of men seemingly half-eaten by some fiendish refrigerator-monster while my mother stood by, arms

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folded, annoyed.) What was important to my mother was that she comply with the terms of her lease and avoid being contractually bound to repaint the entire room. She was always so prudent.

Anyway, my uncle was carrying in this refrigerator, and I was standing, politely observing, when he made The Comment. His actual words escape me, but he said something like "guess you need another one of these to keep up with this one's appetite." (Pointing to me). "Carmen, when'd yew get so fat?!" (Chuckle, chuckle, belch). My mother (much to my shock and disgust) laughed and snorted in agreement. I was crushed, hurt in a way that I would never forget. His remark would eventually find its way into that part of my mind that prides itself on its collection of snubs, insults and just about every negative remark ever shot my way. Understand, this man had gnarled hairs growing out of his ears and nose, a belly large enough to have its own checking account, and some sort of curious skin discoloration across his bald head. But none of that mattered. I wanted my mother to side with me, rescue me, cradle me on her lap like she did when I was a little girl. Instead, she was with him. He condemned me and she agreed. So much for familial support.

At least I felt safe in my prison of flesh. The more skin between me and members of the opposite sex, the less I had to worry about the way their looks and words made me feel. You see, I had to confine myself. I wanted to be fat. It was my only protection. The more physically separated from others I could be, the more in control I was of my own body. I needed the security.

PART II. DETENTION

Do I "love" him? Geez, lady, I don't know. I mean, I'm not sure. Danny was sort of my boyfriend and all, but what do you mean when you say "love?" Strange question. You caught me off guard. I guess I was curious about sex, mostly. We experimented three times. I don't think I really liked it all that much. I liked him enough, you know, but when I looked at him I never thought, hey, maybe I'll spend my entire life with this guy. Besides, we're going to different colleges in the fall. That is, if I can afford to go. It was always understood that our relationship would be over before then. "Love," you ask? How can I explain?

Judy, my "counselor," was waiting for an answer, and I knew perfectly well what she was really asking. If I didn't "love" this person, *i.e.*, intend to marry and live with him till death do us part (which is of course the only legally and religiously acceptable way), how on earth could I have ever engaged in sexual intercourse with him? If I didn't "love" this person, aren't I just the most depraved, immoral transgressor she's ever encountered? You know, premarital sex is bad and all, but not even to have "loved" the one with whom I committed such a sin is, well, she just can't even allow herself to finish that thought. If I didn't "love" this boy, hadn't I just better think about

learning to, now that I am faced with the possible ramifications of my self-indulgent crime?

She was expecting an answer. An uncomfortable silence began to fill the room, but I just couldn't speak. I was trying to shrink from the situation. My hand was closing over my mouth. I noticed that I had scrunched my toes almost completely under the balls of my feet. A random floor tile caught my eye. Complete silence.

The test results weren't even back, yet in the ten minutes that I had been sitting there in that folding metal chair, she had accused and convicted me of the crime, even if the jury was still out on my sentence. All of this was accomplished with just that one question, and with the disdainful arch of a painted-on eyebrow. I was fascinated by the waxy glaze of her face. Glossy Judy. I am not exaggerating. And I could not keep from watching those thin, orange lips. They quivered as she faked a sympathetic smile and sort of undulated when she spoke. She asked more questions. (Apparently my earlier silence was taken as an admission of guilt?)

"Are you aware, Carmen, that *annnnny* time you engage in sexual intercourse," she drawled, "even if using birth control, there is *alllllllways* a risk that you will create a new life?" Evidently, my reticence suggested that I had been living on a deserted island for the past seventeen years of my life. I had an urge, like the feeling you had in fourth grade when the teacher asked if you could add two and two. You didn't want to say four. You wanted to hesitate and say "now, that's a math question, right?" But you didn't. And here it was, that same urge, pushing me to feign bewilderment, slap my thigh enthusiastically and blurt "You don't say, so THAT's how it works!" But I didn't. Instead I just whispered, "Of course," showing the appropriate amount of shame. She wrote something on my form. Was it going to be used as evidence later? I began to feel sick to my stomach. How much longer was it going to take?

"I'll be back with your results in a few minutes," she informed me. "In the meantime, please stay in this room. We ask that you watch the brief film we've set up for you." She paused and looked at me sympathetically, "We understand how overwhelmed young mothers are by the issues surrounding an unexpected pregnancy and we find that this film not only helps you understand the options that are available to you if you are pregnant, but it also helps you see the way down the path toward the responsible choice." Responsible . . . responsible . . . now where could she be going with this? "Now if you have any questions after the film is finished don't you be shy about coming right out and asking." She enunciated everything so carefully, so condescendingly. I almost expected her to leave me a plate of cookies and a glass of milk with a puppet show to follow.

"Now, here is the on and off switch. See this big black button?" There was only one knob protruding from the entire device. I nodded. "Turn the dial

forward to on to watch the film, then back to off when finished.” Was she going to allow me to undertake this complicated task myself? “Start whenever you’re ready,” she purred soothingly.

“May I please have a glass of water?” I heard my timid voice ask. I desperately needed to swallow something. How on earth did I get a dustball in my throat? My very own nerves were trying to choke me to death. The door slammed behind me in response.

Who are these people? I wondered. The ad had simply read: “Free Pregnancy Testing—Confidential.” That was all. How charitable it seemed, how kind they were over the telephone. “Just bring a sample of your first urine of the day,” she’d said cheerfully. I found a small tupperware container and did just that. What a deal. I couldn’t afford a doctor, and the EPT test I used appeared to me to have turned magenta, when it was supposed to either become cloudy but colorless (negative) or form a vivid blue spot in the middle of the indicator (Congratulations!). Mine was neither (no wonder I got a D in chemistry), and I was too embarrassed to buy another test.

Besides, I had already spent an extra \$15 on needless toiletries just to appear to the other shoppers as though a pregnancy test was all in a day’s shopping for a 17-year-old, unmarried, fast-food-restaurant-employed high school student who had recently cheated on an algebra exam. Despite being racked with nervous self-conscious terror, I was at least careful to choose a box with the price sticker on it. I could just imagine the trauma of some pimply-faced checker with braces hefting the box up in the air, yelling across the store “Hey! Somebody wanna get me a price on one o’ these PREGGGGNANNNNNCY tests?!” The jerk would just hold it there, high above his head, drooling and sneering at me in that knowing way while waiting for the response. Just then, one of my mother’s friends would happen to push her cart up to the line. The horror! But it didn’t happen. Somehow, I managed to avoid this scenario and slip through the grocery store unscathed, but I just couldn’t take the risk again.

So here I was, alone in the room. For the longest time I just sat there, staring at the door. It had one of those thick, frosted plastic windows with a criss-cross pattern of bendy wire through it. The more I stared, the more my vision narrowed. The foreground receded. The metal enlarged and became detached from its surroundings. All I could see were those ridiculous square wires. I kept trying to look away, but inevitably my gaze was fixed on the door, confining me. Wires, wires, big wires, bars. I used to stare at chain link fences on purpose for this effect when I was younger. Now the bars were so prominent, so evident. They made me uncomfortable.

A fragment of a story occurred to me. It seemed out of context. I couldn’t recall why or exactly when my grandmother had told it. I think we were talking about my great Aunt Ida stealing chickens or something. She began describing the days when society expected women to be the paragons of

morality, when (supposedly) it was rare that they committed crimes and there simply were no places for them in jails or prisons. Instead, a woman criminal would be placed in a quaint little room called the “matron cell,” apart from the rest of the prison facility. Grandma had said that it was devised to provide space for the highly unusual female deviant, and that the “matron cell” evolved into yet another deceptive means by which women were set apart and judged. I remembered feeling relieved that as a woman in modern society, I wouldn’t be burdened with the dubious honor of setting the standards of morality. I don’t know why this story came back to me while I waited for the verdict. Maybe it was the sense of restriction I felt stealing in on me, or the ominous shadowbars cast across the room by the wiry window. I must have had one of those displaced thoughts that happen sometimes when a neuron suddenly misfires and gets trapped apart from the rest, awkward, out of place.

I flicked on the film, heeding Judy’s command. “The Holocaust is over,” it announced, while footage from Nazi Germany appeared on the screen, flashes of black, white and gray, imploring eyes and contorted bodies. “Or is it?” A man’s authoritative voice queried. “Modern society is practicing infanticide. Those who ignore the lessons of history are doomed to relive it.” On the screen, colorful happy children on swingsets and slides were frozen into their smiles for a moment of photographic splendor.

Suddenly, without warning, I was confronted with a picture of a baby curled up and obviously dead but still perfectly formed. It had hair. And fingers. It was frightening, all blood and skin on metal. How fictitious it seemed, like some kind of clumsy joke. “This is the product of a tragic event,” The Voice proclaimed. Okay, so maybe I was crudely naive to think an aborted fetus looked like . . . well, I don’t even know what I thought one looked like. Surely NOT like THIS. This appeared to be, this WAS a four month old baby! I was disgusted as much by what was being suggested to me as I was by the image itself. Yet, the most awful humiliation flashed over me, a quicktempered rash.

“This child,” he went on saying, “like thousands of others each year, was forcibly removed from the womb and murdered through the medical procedure called (dramatic pause) abortion. Why are they killing our children?” Something in me sensed that this was wrong, although I felt uncomfortable doubting The Voice. After all, this appeared to be a simple educational film, not unlike the all too memorable life science and human sexuality lectures I had endured throughout junior high and high school. Deception never occurred to me.

Next thing I knew, I was witnessing what appeared to be an actual abortion. The doctor had forcefully inserted a long, plastic tube into a woman’s vagina and was raising his elbows to push it in further. She was jerking violently as if she was having some sort of a seizure. There was blood everywhere.

“There are currently several different methods by which abortions are performed,” The Voice continued, “—in secret—by doctors and often unskilled practitioners who are still willing to perform them These procedures include the hypertonic saline method, whereby amniotic fluid is removed from the womb then replaced with harsh, burning saline that results in a slow and excruciatingly painful death for the baby. (Artist’s rendition of a fetus with amazingly developed facial features twisted in agony inserted here). Also used are dilation and curettage (commonly called D & C) . . . the use of prostaglandins . . .” and on and on. I wasn’t listening any more. I suddenly realized that I had been duped. Completely taken. Judy and The Voice were on a mission.

PART III. THE VERDICT

Unless it [is a substantial obstacle to the woman’s exercise of] her right of choice, a state measure designed to persuade her to choose childbirth over abortion will be upheld if reasonably related to that goal. *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 112 S. Ct. 2791, 2821 (1992).

I can’t remember watching the rest of the film, but at some point the screen turned black with the occasional crackle of white fuzz spewing across it. I had been sitting there for some time trying furiously to make sense of what was happening, scrambling to put everything together into a coherent explanation. Judy wanted to help me, didn’t she? I couldn’t really be awake, could I? Aren’t these nice people? Will Judy think I’m awful if I’m pregnant? Oh my God, what if I really AM pregnant? Please, let this all be a mistake.

The results were positive. My guess is that Judy and company probably used the same brand of cheap boxed pregnancy test that I had used, but hadn’t run into the magenta problem. I had been swindled. There I was, handing over my urine to them gingerly so as not to spill, ever so carefully, with the kind of respect and anticipation one would grant a highly trained medical doctor. How moronically I had gushed with appreciation. Later, I learned the truth: They were just an assorted bunch of wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of prominent clergymen from the local baptist congregation. Presumably, they were members in their own right of the church, but their namesake suggested derivation, dilution (delusion). They called themselves simply the “Wives of Welleford Baptist.” Innocuous, quaint. These were the same women who organized Sunday afternoon family softball games, Tuesday night potlucks and Saturday revivals. Some of them were probably well-meaning; maybe others had pasts to vindicate. Really, I could just as easily have donned one of their “lab” coats, marched back into their “laboratory” (probably a tiny bathroom

crammed in the back of the trailer) and processed my own test, sparing myself some Judy-induced anguish.

I had trusted them because initially, over the telephone at least, they were so careful with my secret. I hadn't told anybody. I certainly couldn't tell my mother. So, I trusted them in much the same way that I had trusted Danny when he promised that I would not get pregnant. It had been important to me to be able to trust someone.

I had never heard of "pro-life" organizations setting up pregnancy testing facades in order to badger naive idiots like me into choosing adoption (or at least feeling guilty for the rest of our lives if we didn't). I certainly wasn't aware of this particular alliance, the "Wives of Welleford Baptist." Of course, how could I have known? The office bore no indication, no warning, nothing but a small plastic square nailed to the door that said "Pregnancy Testing This Door." I hadn't thought anything about their curious location, sandwiched between two used car dealerships across from Burger King on the south side of town. I hadn't found the modular building suspicious. I hadn't even questioned their motives. I had simply trusted them, and now all I knew was that I wanted out of there, out of that room with the barred window, away from The Voice and its dogmatic hatred, away from sanctimonious Judy and her disapproval. They didn't know me.

But I was too polite to leave, and Judy wasn't finished. It would have been rude for me to interrupt. After she reported that I was pregnant, before the word finished reverberating throughout the room and bouncing around my head like a puck in an air hockey game, she asked what I planned to do. I dream of having brazenly responded "you mean before or after the abortion?" But, I just mumbled "I don't know." I think I was crying. Of course my answer presented Judy with an opportunity she couldn't refuse. I had given her just enough room to try to wedge her virtuous self in and seize upon my lack of assertiveness, dismantle any prior resolve and fling uncertainty out the window. She was going to have some fun. This was the moment when all of her intensive training was going to come to fruition.

"You are going to marry this boy, aren't you?" she asked, reverting back to self-righteousness. Sympathy can be so impractical at times. I wanted to know her past, suspected, hoped for the worst.

"I can't. W-w-we're both going to college in the fall. At least I hope to. Anyway, he'll be in another s-s-state."

"Well, can't you go with him—"

"I don't think we could afford that . . ."

"—or stay here while he's at school?" (She was gearing up for the big cross-examination, wringing her hands in anticipation.)

"Well . . ."

"Couldn't you live with his parents?"

"I don't think . . ."

“DON’T you THINK you should try? After all, you were grown up enough to get yourself into this, don’t you THINK you should do the right thing?”

“Of course, but . . .”

“I mean, REEEEEALLLY, you’re not considering abortion, are you, especially not after our program, now that you know how horrible it is?”

“I don’t know, I . . .”

“Do you really think it’s fair to this innocent little baby to put your selfish desires first—”

“But . . .”

“—how could you even think of *murdering* your very own child?” (Ouch. That is definitely below the belt, Judith. So to speak.) “You understand responsibility, don’t you?” I was now sobbing, wiping the deluge of snot and tears from my face with the back of my hand. “Do you know that you are responsible for a human being? Abortion is murdering a human being.” She was yelling at me.

She kept asking questions, questions I couldn’t answer. I tried to persuade her that I had no choice. She disagreed. I started to fantasize about having a voodoo doll of Danny, the lucky, impervious little prick. I would stick a thousand Judy-pins into it. It wasn’t all his fault, but I resented that he would never have to know such shame. She was a complete stranger, why didn’t I just leave? What sense of obligation kept me there, watching those pursed, orange lips quiver?

For the first time in my life, reality was too unreal. I wanted to run. I wanted to be in my bed. I wanted to pound my fists on the table and wail and scream at her “Listen, lady! I don’t *want* to get married! Can’t you see? I do not want to marry this boy! No, I DON’T love him. And if my family ever found out about this and I even dared to have this baby I would have no place to live because I have a mother who would have me believe that despite my birth she is still very much a virgin and my father’s been looking for a reason to hate me so he doesn’t have to feel guilty about not paying child support and my grandmother would never look me in the eye or allow me to sit next to her at the piano on Thanksgiving again and college would never happen because I can just see that I’d be spending too much time working at some grimy restaurant sweating french fry grease all day serving BLT sandwiches to people like you just to pay my bills so I could maintain my pitiful existence in a trailer behind some salvage yard all greasy-haired, toothless and laden with cat hair, drinking bourbon every night and burping my lonely self to sleep until I died! How would you like that, Judy?” I would ask maniacally at this point, reeling from fury, wavering dangerously somewhere between composure and anger gone completely berserk, teeth bared, nostrils flaring. I bet that would grab her attention. “In fact, would you rather I just killed myself now? At least I wouldn’t be such an affront to your personal dignity! Would that make you happy, Juu-deeee?”

Of course, I didn't say any of those things. I didn't even come close. I was so nice. This is all just wishful remembering. All I could do was mutter "you don't understand, you just don't understand" whenever I could steal in enough air to do so. At that point I was bawling completely out of control. It did become apparent to me that trying to reason with her only meant staying in that room longer than was necessary. I had to think of a way out of there. Finally, I murmured "would you please g-g-give me the name and number of someone I can talk to about adopting this . . . child. I would appreciate that." At last, freedom. My toes unfurled in relief. Assuming she had won, Glossy Judy favored me with an orange grin (lips actually unpursed this time) and wrote something on one of her pamphlets: "Bob and LeeAnne Martin (512) 232-1523."

"The Martins are a very loving couple in Texas who want to adopt a baby," she explained, "and you can call them collect. Just tell them I referred you." (Wince). "The rest of the booklet contains information on getting in touch with an adoption agency. Good luck to you. You're doing the right thing, Karen." She patted my shoulder. I didn't bother to tell her I wasn't Karen. "We'll call next week to see how you're doing." She oozed.

"Thank you for your help," was all I could manage.

Judy was on the verge of saying something else. I could tell because her painted-on eyebrows were poised anxiously, straining upwards. Grabbing my coat, I hastily thanked her again. I left the building in a panic, running paranoically between cars and over upended cement. Somehow, I found my beat-up Corona. I had unwittingly parked it in one of the used car lots and there was a young couple looking it over, kicking the tires. "Excuse me," I said to their amazement as I frantically yanked open the door, collapsed inside and screeched out of there, tires squealing, door still open. Despite the fact that I was still sobbing hysterically, gasping for air, I drove myself home.

I was wrought with frustration. I felt like my life was over. Everything I had said to Judy was just filtered through her Christianized brain. We were at an impasse. We could never reach a mutual agreement. Why had I even tried? Since my mother was a zealot, I knew that organized religion structures a person's way of comprehending the world in order to submit it to doctrine. Interestingly, it has been said that a religious conservative background often makes it difficult for a person to resolve the abortion dilemma. Thanks, Mom. Jesus, and didn't I already feel bad about enough those days with my less-than-stellar grades, worsening acne and strange (according to my mother) taste in clothing? This incident surely crystallized all of my latent guilt.

Judy didn't understand. It wasn't like I didn't know that there was something alive and growing inside my body. It wasn't like I wasn't thinking about the fact that it might have feelings . . . that it might have a soul. It was just that I didn't know how to deal with all of those feelings and the way they conflicted with the way I had envisioned my life. It wasn't as though I was

convinced that my body was entirely my domain. Having been smacked firmly in the behind by the bible belt, I just couldn't think of choice as an absolute.

I knew that I had been irresponsible and I felt like I deserved to be punished. When I was a little girl, I used to offer to throw rocks at my face when I got into trouble. What a weirdo. I practically begged to be penalized when I was bad. Part of me was still so inclined. Chastise me. I'll take the rock in the face; I'll spend my life in prison. Let's see, this slip should require no less than about, oh somewhere in the ballpark of eighteen years? Or, if we really want retribution here, I could be given the ol' nine month sentence where you're promptly "released" upon delivery. But doesn't birth carry with it probation for life?

Oh, but how to convince the world how sorry I am, how much I regret the curiosity, the cramped back seat, the ignorance? I'm trying to repent here mom, Judy. I wish that you and the others who judge could understand that I'm a person too, a good person. Can't you see? I'm nice to people, I always apologize if they bump into me. I'm respectful of my teachers, agreeable to the customers at work, I spend Sundays with my grandmother at Furr's Cafeteria after church. I play the clarinet. I'm a good kid. I just got caught. Doesn't any of that matter? Maybe if I could just give back that Snickers I stole when I was ten, untaunt the neighbors' dog or retake algebra, then I wouldn't especially deserve this? Maybe I could just beg for redemption? Maybe I should have known better.

One thing I did know: I couldn't just surrender my womb to this growing thing that had invaded it. I didn't have anywhere to go, or even to hide out secretly for the next eight months. The thought of completely disappearing from the face of the earth came to mind, but I'm much too squeamish to initiate self departure. I was never going to call Bob and LeeAnne Martin of Texas.

I was also upset because I knew that a person's store of innocence is finite, and some of it is lost every time you do something wrong. This supply of purity starts off as a smooth round ball, perfect in shape, flawless in form. Each strike of misfortune carves out a piece of the ball. It becomes pitted and dimpled. My father already left a crater, and now I was suffering another huge dent. Could I afford it?

Judy claimed that girls and women who had abortions were mentally scarred for the rest of their lives. She presented me with a long list of symptoms and discomforts that women who had abortions were doomed to suffer. I could expect anything from headaches to insanity. I was mortified. Dr. Humboldt was the only doctor in town who performed abortions, so I drove to his office, parked across the street and watched and waited for the patients to exit. I searched their expressions for signs of permanent hysteria and scrutinized their behavior for indications of the wretchedness Judy had described. They were no help. They just looked like regular people to me.

Still, with so many shards of myself chipped away, my innocence was pockmarked. Would I still be me? No, I would be a freak. I would be emotionally disfigured. They should then send me away to a colony for impure, aberrant women. I could smoke cigarettes all day and lean against the cold cement walls alongside the other deviants, whores and outcasts.

I anticipated how people would perceive me if I chose to have an abortion. Judy would hate me, but I already felt as though she had dismissed me from personhood. My mother would just consider me a huge disappointment, if I ever took leave of my senses and for some inconceivable reason told her. She wouldn't hate me, the way Judy would. As her daughter, I could never become that invisible. She would just look at me with that agonizing "Oh where did I go wrong" expression and sigh despondently . . . every day for the rest of my life.

If I went through with the pregnancy? Mom would be even more thoroughly disgusted with me. She would probably ignore me, in a way that would make the rest of the world notice. I couldn't stand the thought of people's eyes looking at my big stomach and childish face, whether with contempt or pity. Yet, the images of that bloody four-month-old dead baby and the convulsing woman kept coming back to me. And I kept hearing The Voice explaining that sometimes a fetus's heart starts beating at seven weeks. I envisioned a little pinheart beating in my belly and hated myself for wishing it would beat somewhere else.

For two days I locked myself in my room and thought of all of these things. Lying on my bed, I stared at the ceiling for hours, trying to divine some guidance from the patterns of hand-swirled paint above me. All that remained clear was that I was not dreaming. Whatever I chose to do, I could not avoid the inevitable disgrace. Some part of me had already changed. So, I finally made a compromise with Judy and the Judy-types. I could not accept their sentence, but I accepted their judgment. I considered myself a horrible person. I saw myself through their eyes: tainted, lesser, damaged in some permanent way. After all, it was what the movie said I was. It was what Judy had already insinuated I was. I granted my mother, my grandmother and the "Wives of Welleford Baptist" that much.

I spent the remainder of the night tossing and turning, thinking, remembering, hoping that it wouldn't feel this bad forever. The next morning I called Dr. Humboldt and scheduled an appointment.

