

*Helen Laurence*

## **How To Be A Lesbian In 1957 In Seventh Grade**

Stroll across lunchtime grass  
    to the bright group of girls.  
Smile as usual, eager to share,  
until one of those you walk home with  
all giggly sly asks you  
do you know what a queer is.

Muster laughter as the others  
burst into the hilarity only seventh grade girls  
    can manufacture.  
Wonder if your inner confusion  
creates the same chasm across your face  
    as it's carving across your heart.  
Try to make your smile less forced.  
Pray that no one can read your mind.

Next Thursday join the poodle-skirts  
    and learn that wearing green on Thursdays  
    means something.  
Decide to be extra careful on Thursdays.  
Maybe then no one will suspect  
you spend ninety percent of your time  
    daydreaming about women.

Remember, as you ran from sixth-grade boys  
 who tried to grab your new breasts,  
 the whispers and adults speaking of Jess and Deena  
 who must be separated.  
 Remember crying “no” inside,  
 “they are happy and so beautiful, please  
 leave them alone.”

Think back to September when you noticed with joy  
 they still held each other, if more secretly.  
 But why did Deena’s family move from town in spring?

Begin to fully comprehend that preferring women  
 is more shameful than being black, brown, crippled,  
 Jehovah’s Witness, or even retarded.  
 Begin to see that hiding,  
 for you,  
 is not a choice but an imperative.

When the girls suck milk  
 from cow breasts packaged in cartons  
 labeled HOMO milk  
 and titter  
 and speculate on who’s HOMO  
 giggle.  
 Then go home and speculate on  
 sickness, sanity, being HOMO.

Come home from school on time.  
 Try to answer your mother  
 who has read your diary  
 when she asks you why do you love  
 Gale so much.  
 Decide never to leave anything around again.  
 For the next fifteen years burn  
 every journal you write.