

Les Femmes

I am a butch girl, in love with a femme girl
and trapped in Ottawa on a business trip.

Before I traveled, she, horrified that I had
never seen the monument to the Famous Five,
extracted my promise to go.

So, although I am hot, hungry
and in need of my weight in beer,
I take my tattoos, my combat boots, my
short-haired head and set out in this August
sun to find
Barbara Paterson's sculpture on The Hill.

Like a feminist magnetic north, it draws me
easily.
It is a glorious, metallic tea party,
claimed square footage, craftily carved;
an unmoving, life-filled stability.

As soon as I claim the empty chair so kindly
offered by Emily Murphy and sit within,
three boys arrive, as if on cue: all 20's,
uniformed in
khakis and white tee shirts, bursting with
guffaws.

They do not notice me.

They punch Irene Parlby's arm,
make fun of her wide brimmed hat,
hump her silent form.

Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards
steal a glance.
When I laugh out loud, the boys glare with
puzzlement.
I point toward the proclamation held high
by Nellie McClung which, miraculously, they read
aloud:

Les femmes sont des personnes.

They seem to understand that they are
outnumbered,
pause before they skulk away; leave me to my
own devices.

I scratch my head at these seemingly
bottomless gifts from her,
this strong femme who - with a gentle grasp
upon my heart -
takes her rightful place in a proud line of
those who
forge the bronze, and, by heeding Aunt Nellie's
sage advice
to never retreat, explain, or apologize,

grind adversity into a fine powder to soften the
road ahead.

Gwen Bartleman

Gwen Bartleman is a proud butch dyke who was born in Ottawa and has called Toronto home since 1981. Her poems & prose have been published in *Our Times*, *anacoensis*; *The Last Sex*; *Church Wellesley Review/Xtra Magazine* and *Rites Magazine*. Currently, she is working on *Floating in an Eddy of Femme*, her first collection of poetry.