

Excerpt from
AMORA

We are women, and we like it

I let the afternoon slip by, a cup of coffee before me. Around me, a steady murmur of voices, of children running between the tables like flies wounded by the light. I feel isolated, however. It is a pause in my day. A gift from time. Just for me. To recollect my life. To pinpoint my life cycles. The path traveled. My years of solitude, of feeling like a strange toadstool, different from any other woman I knew. Completely alienated from the domestic reality of my former schoolmates, from the longings for marriage and motherhood of my colleagues at work, from my neighbors' mediocre lives. I, the strange one. The silently maladapted. The one who never understood why she wasn't like the others. How long ago seems that October morning in 1977 when I heard the feminists speak out for the first time and I told myself—dazed by surprise—"But I am a feminist, and I didn't know it!" What bewildering joy to discover that there were women who lived like me, who shared my hopes, who spoke my language. What touching relief to find answers to questions that had been troubling me since my childhood. I attended my first meeting at Marta Lamas' like someone keeping an unavoidable appointment with the unknown. Terror, curiosity, nervousness, hope. There were fourteen of us. We started to talk about abortions, lovers, lost virginities. We grew intimate, candid. We drank red wine. We rocked with laughter, every so often someone would get up to pee. We felt deliciously perverse and marvelously free as we told each other things we wouldn't share with anyone else. Then I knew I was no longer alone. That I had found a new meaning for the word friendship. I began to wear the stigma of feminism with such pride! *What a pack of crazy old fools, hags, idle women. What a bunch of lesbians, of manhaters. What a band of ugly, bitter women.*

But, say what they may, the women of the future are going

to have much to thank us for, we, the pioneers in saying no, in thinking, in daring to live alone, to be independent, to run risks, to refuse to be sexual objects, to face a secular and patriarchal society with a new mentality.

Most of us are burdened with dreadful histories that not only have failed to annihilate us but from which we learned to draw our strength. Millions and millions of women being born to a new identity, searching within and outside ourselves, eager to attempt new ways of being, anxious for a more dignified and equitable relationship with a man or with another woman, knowing ourselves for the first time in our lives. The panorama of possibilities open to us has startled us, we can't believe our eyes. Some of us are perhaps terrified. But it is too late to stop. The process has begun and there's no going back. It becomes clearer every day: we are the force of the future, the engine driving our coming history, and men know it and tremble. Many men will share our dawn. The rest will resort to desperate measures that will only hasten their downfall. Those willing to renounce their privileges will build the new society by our sides.

For many people, feminist is synonymous with lesbian. I wish it were so! But, not all feminists are lesbians and—unfortunately—not all lesbians are feminist. If you just knew what a hard struggle it was to get many “feminist sisters” to accept lesbians in their own groups. God forbid if someone got us mixed up . . . It was quite a relief to them when the Mexican Homosexual Liberation Movement was organized. But people still hold on to that notion. And yes, some feminists are lesbians, that is, some of us are women who love other women, which only means that we too are people, one of the two genders of humanity, and look—what a coincidence!—we are born, we grow up, we reproduce and we die . . . just like the rest of the human race; we enjoy ice cream and tacos; oh infamy!, we have to work to pay the rent; we get beaten down on like Lupita D'Alessio; we take buses, jitneys, and even the subway; we belong to all religions, political ideologies and signs of the Zodiac, and, as Rita Mae Brown has said, we come in all colors and flavors. Yes, just like you, we ended up living on the planet Earth, in the twentieth cen-

tury, and to top it off in the Federal District of Mexico, so some of us are a little neurotic, just like some of you. And it is true that—just like you—we sometimes plunge headlong into love affairs that are real melodramas in several acts. And the worst thing is that sometimes it's just like going out with a guy, or worse still, that we act like the guys. Oh, whoa!, one says all of a sudden, what happened here? Well, nothing, that no matter how feminist, how free, how well-intentioned we are, we are mired in clichés, in learned habits, in traps, self-sabotages, limitations, a drag and a half, in short.

Of course, we would have to learn to love differently. To exchange the Mexican *rancheras* and the *boleros* for our own music, invented by us and our girlfriends. How I would love to print a full-page ad in all the newspapers, something like an invitation to all lesbians still repeating the patterns of domination so common in heterosexual love relationships: let's love differently, without slashing our veins, without threatening to jump from a car on the funicular, without ending up throwing up in Garibaldi Square or snatching away our friend's girlfriend just to show people how fucking irresistible we're being nowadays, that is, let's not love like they say lesbians love, as if we were the female version of the Black Charro. Because, I say, so much publicity is given to love and then it ends up with our looking pale and with dark circles under our eyes, depressed, saying at the age of twenty-two that life is not worth living, and that all chicks are the same. But no, fortunately, life is worth a lot and we're not all the same. There are still some of us who think that love can be different, that it is not necessary to fall in love passionately in order to build a life as a couple, that there are other options besides cohabitation and possessiveness, that we struggle each day against jealousy, that we hold our friend's freedom and privacy highly, that we try to speak honestly so as not to allow room for resentment, in short, that we make efforts to make of our love an oasis to run to after a day of working for the government, of standing in line to take the Route 100 bus, of breathing lead and amoebas from seven o'clock in the morning.

For me, to realize I could love women was as important as it

was for Columbus to discover America. And it isn't that I had bad relationships with men. Quite the contrary! I went out with the cutest guys, which I really enjoyed until way into my twenties. We would go bowling, to the movies, drinking, dancing to Barbarella's, out to eat tacos and to fool around. But as I got to know myself better, they would relate to me less and less, until the time came when the gaps between us were bigger than the fillings. By then, women had begun to shine in my universe. Ah, women! So crucial to my life, for better or worse.

My mother, who did not crumble to pieces when my father left her. Who, although she kept repeating that a woman needs a man in order to exist, demonstrated the opposite in practice.

My grandmother, to whom I owe, among other things, two of the most beautiful gifts I received during my childhood: the love of books and knowing how it feels to be the most important being in someone's life.

My sisters, who showed me with their example exactly how I didn't want my life to be.

Miss Marianne, my literature teacher, who sowed in me forever a passion for British poets of all centuries.

Those anonymous women, traveling companions in the Roma-Mérida and Mariscal Sucre routes, who taught me how to defend myself from feelers and masturbators, also anonymous.

Those colleagues who welcomed me so sweetly the first time I set foot in an office, at the age of fifteen, dying of fright. And those others who would later be my rivals, and thanks to whom I learned to raise my voice and demand my rights.

Doña Raymunda, spiritualist and my grandparents' neighbor in Veracruz, who talked to me for hours about how we must love every living being in this world and about how death doesn't exist because in reality we are souls dressed in bodies and minds.

Paola, who with her eyes full of fire and her tender lips awakened me to the possibility of loving women.

Eva, my first love relationship, with whom I lived for four years, and who was able to recognize and fulfill my longing to dis-

cover the mysteries of art and literature, who taught me to appreciate good films and theater, and to love classical music. Eva, who wasn't able to understand that forever doesn't exist and turned the last weeks of our love story into a true hell.

Marisa, my lover, my friend, my cosmic sister, my proudest relationship. Seven years of living together with love and without deceit. Why separate after passion subsides when there are so many other things left? Only the physical distance that took her to her job in Europe finally forced us to live under different roofs.

And all those other women I have loved, those whom I fooled myself into believing I loved, those who were not able to love me. I owe them my strength. Through them I learned my capacity to love, and to cry. I learned the exquisiteness of passion. Their presence is always with me, because they are part of my history.



This surely must be how goddesses love

Fresh moon water, with silver glints. Lace sheets. Shroud of light. Mother-of-pearl bed. Two women. Two. Face to face in this unrepeatable game which is love. Fever of desire, song in one voice. Love dart nearing its target, sweet whisper. I let the afternoon undress you, I let it consecrate your skin. You offer yourself like a flower, like a giant wave. What an urge to kiss you! But I only look at you, look at you . . . and I don't dare touch you. Your aroma surrounds me. I sense you, my love, I sense you. You have fire inside. Time doesn't exist. Only this. A fusion of sighs, a tempest of echoes. What drunkenness. What joy. A flight of turtledoves over your body. A nest of larks your nest. Your flesh-colored grotto. I yearn, I yearn for your womb, for the coral between your thighs. I trace your contour with my eyes. I look at you a thousand times. I look at you again and never grow tired. How many wetnesses flow over us. Oh sweat that makes our flesh glow! Quietly, the silence listens to us desiring each other. From your shore, your breath reaches me and bites me, excitedly. The afternoon is dyed with sap, with

bird-flowers, with the smell of sandalwood. Your tender sex invites me. So does your hair. Your nipples dare me. How I would like to fill my mouth with them! Come near, the sails of my love are ready to navigate to your deepest skin, to touch your essence. Come, let's love and love and love and love each other, and never stop. Your pupils sparkle with such tenderness. Our backs arch and tremble. So much wealth in a simple look. You finally shatter the space with your hand, you touch my lips lightly with your fingertips. You break Sleeping Beauty's spell. Desire overflows in an infinite swing. Our caresses unstring the night. The semi-darkness is a shawl that covers our shoulders. Outside, the wind blows history away. Under the sheets, a love belonging to the cosmos, two women love each other in a secret language, withdrawn from the world. In spite of everything.



Love is a many-splendoured thing

"Tell me how you realized that you could love women."

We are in Claudia's bed, facing the wooded landscape of a ravine. We have just made love. I hold her tightly in my arms, and she lets me love her.

"I already told you . . . Besides, that was a very long time ago."

"Precisely because it was, tell me! I didn't know you then."

"Well, here it goes: 'Once upon a time there was a little princess . . .'"

"Amora, don't be such a clown!"

"Ok, ok, but only from the time I went to Cuernavaca with a colleague from work and, at a given moment, she stared into my eyes, held my chin and drew near me to kiss me, on the lips!"

"Yes, from that point."

"I thought I was going to have a fit. In a fraction of a second a flood of thoughts overwhelmed me. 'I'm sure she's a lesbian. What do I do now? Do I push her away? Do I hit her? Should I scream? Should I run out of here?' I didn't know how to react, but

that wonderful part of me which tends towards a shockproof mental health, went into action. 'Lupe, my girl, aren't you the one going around proclaiming that you want to experience everything so that you don't have to hear about it? Well, this is part of everything!' It was as if I had fought an inner battle and well, I relaxed, I allowed myself to be kissed, I returned the kiss, and that was when . . ."

"When what?"

"When I started to feel very pleasant, very different things. My blood galloped through my veins, I felt a new warmth in my body, as if my skin were alive, separate from me, as if my lips had turned softer, I don't know how to explain it very well."

"And what else happened?"

"She undressed me very delicately and we made love. Well, she made love to me because I, apart from being a beginner, was in Nirvana. Everything was spinning around me!"

"How old were you?"

"Twenty two."

"But you had already made love to guys, right?"

"Of course! And I continued doing it long after, falling deeply in love with some."

"And why not anymore?"

"Less and less all the time, it's true. I have tried, but . . . emotionally, they're just children. They can't touch my soul! Although, as I've told you, I will be open to a heterosexual relationship till the end of my days."

"And when you had that incident with that girl, did you feel any guilt or conflict?"

"Never! Quite the contrary. I was levitating with happiness. I had the feeling I had uncovered a very important secret, that I had recovered half of the world."

"What a lucky one you are!"

"Norma says I must come from another planet because I don't react like earthlings do. But it's just that I thought: 'Anything that awakens such beautiful feelings in me can't be bad.' What madness! I was dying to embrace people in the streets and cry out: 'One

can also love women! Obviously, not only did I never do that but many years went by before I could tell anyone about it."

"I wish I could feel like that, but I can't. I'm scared. Sometimes I think that we're really just friends, but when we make love and you make me feel all this, I realize that I am fooling myself, that we are lovers. And my fear returns!"

"What are you afraid of, Claudia? Of what people will say? Of what you feel? Of what?"

"Of everything! But yes, mostly of what people will say."

"Claudia, life is not a gift but an option. Life is not about suffering from trying to do what others want you to do instead of what you truly want."

"I find sexuality to be the most conflictive aspect of all."

"Sexuality has to do with life. It's an everyday thing, but it's been surrounded by so many taboos that we find it difficult to reconcile it with our eagerness to be coherent."

"What does it mean for you to be coherent, Amora?"

"To live according to your beliefs, not to allow any part of your self to be denied, to give your self every possibility to develop."

"But that is almost impossible."

"What matters is to be true to yourself, Claudia, to feel life around you, in spite of everything. And I swear to you, sweetheart, that no one can say that we're not trying, every day, every instant."

"Who's we?"

"Women of conscience, in our case, feminists."

"Amora, what really is feminism?"

"I suppose there are as many feminisms as there are women in the world. To me, it is a life project that restores to us our historical value. One should be the first to recognize one's own value, and with that as a foundation, demand the same recognition from the beings around you."

"It's an exhausting task."

"Of course it is! Do you think it's easy to have a conscience? It's a pain in the ass! And there's no going back! But one doesn't choose . . ."

"I sometimes wish I didn't know anything."

"If you like to live with clenched teeth, that's up to you."

"If you don't know anything you don't have to live with clenched teeth."

"Not necessarily. How many women without conscience bear situations that make them live with clenched teeth."

"It also frightens me to see that you and I see life in so very different colors."

"Ah, but it is the combination of colors that make up the most beautiful paintings."

"This is the closest thing to happiness I've ever known, I don't know why I'm so scared. It's stupid, I admit! I have spent years dreaming of a love like this, and now I'm scared."

"Great loves exist, Claudia. It's just a matter of learning to recognize them, of not fearing them when they appear in your life, because they don't always arrive in the shape one expected."

"Oh, Amora, you make me feel so good!"

Claudia kisses my neck. I melt. She brings her lips near my ear and says to me:

"Who loves you, Amora?"

"Well, to begin with, me . . ."

She bursts out laughing:

"Overtime! This is too much! This feminist works overtime!"

"And since she works so hard she's dying of hunger . . ."

We get up, half-dressed, wearing long t-shirts and no panties.

"Oh, Amora, I'm going to freeze my little tail off."

"Your what?"

"My little tail," she replies, covering her sex with both hands.

"Claudia, it is your vulva, your sex, your flower, your dove, your butterfly, something more . . . poetic!, how can you call it a little tail?"

"That's what they taught me as a child."

"I must admit you were luckier than I."

"Why?"

"Because back in Veracruz, boys had little birds and girls had little cockroaches."

"Really?"

"I swear to you. Imagine, growing up with the sensation of having a cockroach between your legs, and people still ask me why I'm in therapy!"

In a matter of minutes we move from the depths of our being to the simplicity of a couple of boiled eggs, bathed in a strange sauce that Claudia invents, mixing almost alchemical substances right before my eyes, eyes full of tenderness toward this tiny magician capable of bringing so many new flavors into my life.

We install ourselves back on the mattress. Claudia takes off her t-shirt and her breasts appear like two exotic fruits from some island lost even to geographical atlases. I make an effort to concentrate again on the food trays.

We turn on the television just as three moustached charros with guitar and hats sing the ballad of Rosita Alvirez:

Hipólito arrived at the party

and asked Rosita to dance.

Since she was the prettiest girl there she didn't spare him a glance.

"Rosita, don't you dare snub me,

they'll notice if you do."

"Why should I care about all that, I will not dance with you."

He reached down for his holster

and drew his pistol out,

and into poor Rosita

he fired three fatal shots.

"Dead for being a tramp!" Claudia concludes.

"Not at all! Dead for daring to defend her right to choose

which man to dance with."

"Dead for being a feminist then!"

"Let's just say that's a very *sui generis* interpretation."

"Why? You don't like my explanation? Rosita Alvirez, first Mexican feminist to die in the line of duty."

"The very first, I don't know about that. Can you imagine all the anonymous dead women in this country, assassinated for having dared contradict our national *charros*?"

"I see your point. There should be a monument to them like that of the unknown soldier."

"Of course! In honor of the unknown rebellious woman, that is, of all those women who dared say no."

"And just for that the motherfuckers slapped the hell out of them!"

"Yes, ma'am. Although that is not a very feminist way to talk."

"What should I say then? The fatherfuckers?"

"Father? Lord no! What sense does it make to say fatherfuckers when in Mexican society fathers are best known for not being around. Anyone can say to me *fuck your father* and I couldn't care less. My parents divorced when I was six years old and he completely forgot that he had contributed to the procreation of five human beings. You tell me if that has any power to insult me. Not at all!"

We turned off the tv set and went back to cuddle in our nest. Now it's my turn to let myself be loved. I start to respond and we make love once more. We loved each other for a long while, until I dozed off in Claudia's arms. I don't know how much time has gone by. Suddenly, I recall the time, and with my lips glued to her neck I say:

"Sweetheart, do you realize that we have spent close to forty hours in this room?"

"Humm . . . I love our anarchy," she says as she stretches out.

And she adds:

“Oh, Amora! Sometimes I think that I could live with you.”

She remains thoughtful, sighs and asks:

“What would it be like to live together?”

Waxing poetic (and silly), I sit on the bed, think for a moment, and say:

“Humm . . . if I lived with you, I would rise before the sun, and before I pushed the sheets away, I would leave my prints on you as if you were made of sand. I would bring you carnations for breakfast and would spy on you through the bathroom keyhole to see you commune with the water. We would have our own code, we wouldn't fall back on habits and grudges, we would walk around the house barefoot, embracing each other with each glance. We would drink wine or tea before the fireplace, while it rains outside. And I would feel outrageously happy as I watched you discovering all the cardinal points of your womanhood.”

Claudia watches me, enraptured.

“Oh, Amora, there's no doubt about it: love is a many-splendored thing!”

Translated by Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert