

CHELSEA GIRLS

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PREFACE BY EILEEN MYLES

Apart from the fact of trying to figure out if *Chelsea Girls* is a novel or a memoir or a collection of stories (or whether it's really even a book at all) I think I mainly want to tell you that in the time of the writing of *Chelsea Girls* --- which was long: 1980 to 1993 was the actual time of the composition of the thing—I mostly needed to say what I thought was real. I wanted to *cover* it. I probably wanted to make a film more than anything else and so did my girlfriend (for much of this time) but how could *we* make a film. We had so little. People were making films around us in the East Village and we weren't even seeing them but we were hearing about them and we wanted to make films too. And we tried one night and we thought about it for months and I don't think I even saw that footage for years but we had no idea what we were shooting since the camera didn't have that part (to tell when it was shooting or not) but the point was we made that attempt and finally I just wrote about it. The first chapter I wrote here, "Bread & Water", was like a substitute film. Because we couldn't make a film I just had to decide that writing could be a film.

So *Chelsea Girls* initially and finally is a lot of things it's

not. Little films, videos, performances, accounts of lots of recuperated disasters, long-form poetry, myths. Like I look at my secret favorite story here February 13, 1982 and it's an account of the disaster of the author's first book party. Everybody who writes knows (and even people who don't write know this) that a book will change your life. So this is a story about how that didn't happen. And how it did. I remember thinking that night that being famous was about the stupidest thing there was. To be standing at your party being ogled or ignored, to be trying to figure out like always where to be in the loft and it was your party meant it was the beginning of the end which is myth, right. When I say long-form poetry I just mean that when poetry was invented nobody knew what it looked like so why shouldn't it look like this and sound this way. I don't think anything about whether something is poetry or prose but people do really like it if you say it's a novel. I like it. For a while if you said a poem was a performance people would say wow. I love your poetry. And the person who wrote this book wanted that of course. As all these dreamy messy evanescent experiences were happening and the person living and writing was crying of course because everything was always going to be gone and how would she ever be real unless she told the story of it. Who was she. It's definitely the story of a "dyke", a one syllable word in a less complexly gendered time and I really wanted to tell her truth even before she was *that*—when she was just a little kid. Life is shocking to me, is and always was, full like a garden of so many selves. I was sitting in a garden in the East Village last summer, Le Petite Versailles it was called, and it was on the occasion of the memorial for a friend

of mine, Leonard Drindell who, among his many things, was a taker of so many photographs and I remember sitting at the memorial thinking that in some ways Leonard's heyday was the '80s when you would stand around looking at a somebody's pictures they just developed and later on they'd put them all over their walls, a collage. Leonard always took the grossest and craziest pictures. I was thinking that Leonard was really an analog man and then I thought (and I took a few notes on my phone) and this is a really analog book. And the writing is the analog for the time. Writing was the only enhancement, the diversity, the imaginary like the only space I could go to then to show how utterly real it all was—I think to be female and strange and to want art so much and be drunk and high even waking up from that, all of it and really to have lived.

BATH, MAINE

I really had no damn business there. I mean, why am I living with my ex-girlfriend and her new girlfriend, and *her* ex-girlfriend. How could that possibly be comfortable. I could be writing this from a jail cell. Funny, huh? Ted and Alice, before I left, said: “Out of the frying pan and into the fire, Eileen.” I didn’t know what else I could do. I flew, yes I did, up to Portland and Judy and Chris picked me up there. I was so ripped on the plane. Elinor had given me some of that crystal, one good line, and I had a handful of Tom’s pills. He had stayed at my place the night before. I was writing these poems up in the air, really stupid ones all over those cocktail napkins they give you. God, they were awful. About vitamins and stuff. I was off cigarettes which always made me particularly insane and I had those red beads on, when did they break, I remember them breaking in Maine—well, the two of them picked me up—I remember we went right into a bar—I think I remember having a shrimp salad sandwich and beers, and Chris was already drinking icy Margaritas. The place had all lobsters up and traps and all. Then we got back in Judy’s car. That night we all went to the gay bar

in Augusta. Oh god, that night. We were all speeding, and drunk, and it was real hot. All the men were taking their shirts off and dancing. We got mad. We wanted to take our shirts off. So we did. Everyone thought it was great. Except the manager and a couple of fag bartenders. Put 'em on. The men don't have to put their shirts on. Just get out. You can't be in this bar with your shirts off. Put your shirts on and get out. We did. But first we took our pants off and walked out. Chris threw a beer bottle at them too. She always had a lot of style. This is just three years ago.

After that everything went pretty much the same way. The night I was all amorous in the back seat of Judy's car with Daragh, her ex-girlfriend, we were actually out looking for Chris who had left us because she was looking for someone else, a man. Naturally, we were all smashed. Chris had been picked up by the cops for whatever the Maine initials were for operating under the influence. Understand, this was common practice to get arrested. We worked at this mill and every morning, or pretty close, someone had been arrested for speeding, drunken driving, had an accident, got in a fight. This is baseball hat and truck country. I loved it. The men were all men, and we were all lesbians, and everyone loved to get smashed. After work we'd sit on this big green lawn and Casey, the boss, would put down case after case of Bud Light and Labatt's and we'd just get crazy. Sheila was a problem. She was this big blonde girl, and she was Casey's girlfriend and she was really interested in the fact that me and Christine were lesbians. Now, I am a sucker for paternalism, I love having a boss who's a young good old boy, and when his girlfriend seems to want to go the other

way, fascinating as it seems, and I do want to be the one she's wild about, nonetheless, I try and turn the other way.

Chris stopped drinking after the arrest night. She still had to go to court, it was a small mess. I loved her not drinking, she just got prettier and prettier, all glowing, and she got rid of that bloat she was getting from beer. I have never seen it make as much difference as it did with her. Also it was a relief. One night I was in bed with Judy and she came at me with a crowbar. I'm going to re-shape your head, asshole. What a frightening moment. I could see the shadow of her head, hand and crowbar against a strong light from behind. See, I had actually been up for a week the month before and had thought it was just like Valhalla. You know, it was just like paradise. Judy has this house in the middle of all this land in Maine, and out back are sheep bah-ing, and she had dogs, one a black lab named Myles, and there's little kittens, and hens out back, and a rooster, and fresh eggs and beautiful breakfasts with fried potatoes and tia maria in our coffee in bed. The first night I was up that time me and Chris were instantly back in love once we got drunk, and were out in a hallway, kissing each other, and saying: what about Judy. So the three of us were in their big bed—I just happily climbed right on top of Judy. Christine didn't like that—I wasn't supposed to get so into it. It was *smash*, battles, right from the start—though only one major eruption that week—Chris had gone out running, leaving Judy and me in bed and when she came back something was going on that—“How come you never fucking do that to me, Judy!” Judy would soon get hers. Christine was an emotional tyrant. Her and I had lived together for a couple of years in New York,

before she came to Maine, and it took watching the movements of her and Judy's relationship to see just how demanding and impossible she was. I myself was a good-natured cloud, which would float by and steal things, and wait for praise. I could never understand why life just didn't feel substantial enough. I was sitting on your couch, or we were drinking your whiskey in my apartment. Now, let's go out, I'd say. Do you have any money. I'm broke tonight. I'm really sorry.

One night after work we all went drinking in Bath, Maine. "We" meant me, and Chris who was breaking out that night, figured it was okay, Sheila wanted to go out with us, and we had to go home and pick up Judy. I guess they all were going to play that night, they had a guy in Bath they played with, Mr. Michael, some kind of architect with a loft. All of Judy's friends were professionals pretending to be artists. Pretty disgusting, yet they had the stuff: lofts, the cars, houses etc. They are the mommies and daddies. Usually they're so insipid and have nothing to say, but you get to be fabulous, for a while. For me, they're like jobs.

I don't think Judy was overwhelmed with love for me. I think I was there to be neutralized. You know, Christine would get drunk and call me. Or, she'd just talk about me all the time. Okay, let's get this icon and get her on my farm. Things would happen like one night Judy had her whole collection of mangy men over: Ron, the lumber man, who she was always going "clamming" with tomorrow, or who was the little weasel who knew all about, what, electricity or something. They were all anti-intellectual types who were dying to fuck Judy and she kept them around for, I don't know, enter-

tainment, and certainly real help, and I think she thought of them as colorful, possibly admirable. They made her think she was countrified. She was a consultant to an environmental outfit, she would go and look at fish factories and come back drunk. Previously, she had been a broker in San Francisco. Now she's some kind of film person in Boston. Judy looks right. And she'll never stop telling you about what kind of good girls' school she dropped out of. Her mother's a drunk. She's one of those women who despises her mother and is just like her.

So Judy said to Chris once, riding in her car, I just don't see where Eileen gets off thinking she has the last word on truth. That's what she said. What's funny is I picture her car saying it. You know, one of those shots where the white Datsun is wobbling through the narrow windy roads of mid-coastal Maine and the car says: ". . . thinking she has the last word on truth." Fuck you, Judy.

I remember standing in the back of the truck that fateful night drinking a Bud Light and thinking: this is not going to be perfect—about the night, it looked too perfect—going with the girls to Bath. Judy and Chris would play with Michael, Judy on bass, Christine on rhythm, Michael on lead. Sheila and me roving through the local bars, sounds okay, but—what?

What I was trying to say about Judy and her gross men was that she'd have these smelly horny guys come over—that night we made a pitcher of strawberry daquiris with Mount Gay which I was currently binging on, and once drunk Chris passed a slip of paper to Judy which I later learned said, I want to eat you—how Christine paid her rent, and the two went

giggling stumbling off, leaving me to be game warden to her charming friends. This is why I had been invited to Maine. These guys talked real slow—stopped after each phrase for your girl-reaction. The best I could do was an occasional *heh*. After a while I just stared at my feet.

At work we dipped in these small—or sometimes fairly large—wooden frames into vats of stain. Their destination was the cheap carnivals, and beach towns of America. Those mirrors that say Grateful Dead, or NY Yankees. After dipping the frames into vats of stain and lining them up in rows of twenty on the sticks overhead, bundling them, and putting the plastic tape around each bundle and stacking them in the truck to Chicago or wherever, at the end of the day I'd be covered from head to foot with brown stain, Dickensian-looking I thought. I usually didn't bother to get the stuff off before I got drunk. With me sloppy has always been good, meant sexy.

But this night we were using this “glup”—it was tan, looked like bacon fat, and seemed to come in Mason jars, but the people I knew bought it in quantity. We were really going out, so we had to take the spots off. That's what I usually looked like: a dalmatian. I just think dogs are the cutest beings, and the most perfect. Sheila seemed to be getting bombed on the vodka, cape coddors we called them. I remember taking showers, having a drink going and a beer going, being way up there and wondering if maybe tonight I wouldn't have to come down.

The light looked translucent, just pearly, as we drove into Bath with plenty of beers in the car. I really missed drugs. All we ever had was this shitty homegrown pot. David was coming up at the end of the month and I was begging him to bring

heroin. It was beginning to seem preferable to getting drunk. I mean, if you were going to get really drunk, you could just achieve the same state in a much less messy manner by snorting some stuff. I liked it. But the last time I got some we got beat.

We parked out in front of Michael's, and Sheila decided she needed to lay down in the loft. See, we worked really hard, starting at about six, so some nights you had no tolerance at all. So I went up for a minute, sort of remember a big yellow bathroom, and an extremely pleasant loft that Michael had "done a lot of work on," those people are so boring. I was glad to be going off on my own.

The bars in Bath were like the bars everywhere, except with that New England distrust, no one talks to you. I whipped out my notebook, but I couldn't even communicate with myself. I was drinking vodka and grapefruit. I had on a white teeshirt with FATS WALLER on the front. I ate a lot of peanuts. Next bar I switched to tequila. What could happen. I sat at like this long coffee table, kind of Gothic looking, ancient S & M, with a big candle. I didn't want anyone to come near me. The place looked kind of "datey," like it was attached to a restaurant. The clientele was sunburned and clean, like vacationers. Was I feeling better? In the last place when I had nothing to say in my notebook I began to write the words from the jukebox

And only love
can break
your heart