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Seminole Still

Julie Buckner Armstrong

Note: The following may also be accessed at <http://www.valdosta.edu/distance/MANIFESTA.htm>

Chapter 1

The Manifesta of Fredonia Woolf

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3. Patriarchy: A Definition
4. Ways to Combat Patriarchy: Their Advantages and Disadvantages
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1. The Problem: Woman's Place in the Global Economy

The world offers few, if any, safe places to be a free woman. In most African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern countries, a woman's life is often cheap but rarely free. In North America and Europe, freedom is merely rhetorical tool, a seductive advertisement to get you in the door before they stick you with the price of admission. The worth of a woman's life in the global economy? Ha! If your XX chromosomes are allowed to survive full term, and you escape being drowned in the local river at birth, then the mutilation process begins. Only the literal minded still use scalpels and stitches; those groups claiming to be more advanced prefer psychological instruments. They tell you that your body is foul yet tempting and must, at all costs, be covered and regulated. Or they tell you that your body must, at all costs, be an object of beauty and therefore displayed and decorated: its claws painted pink, its bottom side ruffled, its ears pierced, and its head Velcroed to tiny doo-dads. Any sense of personal freedom that you manage to hold onto throughout childhood must be obliterated in adolescence. You will be lucky to get past this stage without being raped, abused, sold into prostitution, put to work in a sweatshop, starved (through external or internal pressures), or at the very least, reminded continually of the many flaws you possess or the limits you face because you are female. That is fe-male/wo-man, something extraneous to and, therefore, lesser than male/man. In adulthood, assuming that you make it, your inferior status will be confirmed by the laws of your god and your government, by the family you

will serve as maid, cook, laundress, nurturer and sexual plaything, and by the job (assuming you are allowed one) that will pay you approximately two-thirds the amount that it will pay a man. This number, not coincidentally, is one calculated by America's so-called founding fathers to determine the population and value of their chattel slaves, each equaling two-thirds of a man. Such is the place of woman in our modern global economy.

The world's various feminist movements have made many advances to be sure. The United States, considering itself the most enlightened, allows women to vote and to access a (somewhat limited) range of educational, occupational, and reproductive choices. Yet even here, few safe places remain, if any, in which to be a free woman. The political sphere most certainly is not one. Laws protect us only when we have the money, connections, or proper skin color to make sure they are enforced. Our elected officials still constitute an old boys' network that lets women in only when they don red suits as markers. If you doubt me, survey the gallery in the next state of the union address. The public sphere? Forget about it! A woman can barely walk down the street without being pawed or undressed by probing eyes. Airbrushed T&A impales us from every newsstand and television screen. Radio waves fire insults and violence at us, calling them "free speech" and "true love." Even cyberspace, that supposedly democratic, relational web, remains in control of males and their fantasies. Try searching under "woman" as a key word and see what you get.

The least safe place for a woman these days is her own home. If you do not believe me, consult the statistics at your local women's shelter or rape crisis center, that is, if your town has one. They will tell you that one out of every two women in this country will suffer domestic violence, that one in four women will be raped, the majority of them by someone they know. Coincidentally (?) women are encouraged to remain in our domestic spaces for the sake of the nation, nay, the world. Our country's primary exports in the global economy, freedom (!) and equality (!), the old boys and their red-suit

compatriots will tell you, depend for their success upon the domestic strength and tranquility nurtured by the traditional family values that reached their apotheosis in the 1950s suburban housewife, the 1850s angel in the house, and 18th century, “Revolutionary” republican motherhood. Anything that does not conform to this model, the old-boy/red-suit logic goes, threatens it. Women who choose to partner with women (and men who choose to partner with men) precipitate some unnamed chain of events that will snowball into the demise of heterosexual relationships as we know them, thus threatening the very fabric of our national being. (Never mind that homosexuality has been documented as a practice that reaches back at least 3000 years without affecting heterosexuality one whit.) Similarly, women who work outside the home will raise large bands of roaming, drug-addicted murderers and thieves who revel in destroying the good citizenry’s quality of life. And women who, god forbid, act as single parents do so in a malicious plot to overturn the economy by overburdening the welfare system. A woman’s place in the global economy, it seems, is in a home with a man who odds are will abuse her, rape her, or at the very least consign her to the form of slave labor that is euphemistically classified under “housewife.”

2. Free Woman: A Definition

Given the scarcity of safe places, one must admit the difficulty of being a free woman. By the term, “free woman,” I mean primarily one who is not enslaved to the global economy via the domestic sphere: (1) confined in order to care for the needs of a man who participates in and benefits from other spheres of influence (i.e., the workforce, government, educational system, etc.); (2) designed to consume goods and services marketed as necessary for personal welfare and happiness but in actuality superfluous to personal well-being (televisions, mini-vans, processed foods, and hygiene products such as anti-aging cream and vaginal sprays); (3) consigned to produce children who will in turn grease the wheels of the global economic system by becoming producers and consumers themselves. A woman is not free even if

she is complicit in this arrangement, believing that she has “chosen” it voluntarily. What would happen, for instance, if she chose to walk away? At minimum, her husband and other family members, believing themselves to act “for her own good,” would cajole her into deprogramming sessions under the guise of religious or secular counseling or even “couples therapy.” Failing that, they might try to modify her behavior through one of the widely available medications designed for treating “depression.” A woman who continued to resist, especially if she continued to resist emphatically, would more than likely be locked up for more intensive deprogramming. Many women who believe that they have freely chosen this lifestyle, yet feel vaguely unsettled by it, skip this chain of events and opt immediately for the medication stage, numbing themselves with alcohol, food, sex, shopping, or one of the aforementioned depression drugs. Such a woman is perhaps the least free; she is both slave to the system and slave to the addiction she has developed to make it bearable. The logic that blames this problem on the woman’s desire to be free, rather than the system of slavery itself and the tools for reinforcing it, defies understanding.

For a woman to be free, she must at minimum live outside her designated domestic space within the global economy. However, a woman may be single, homosexual, and/or inhabiting traditionally male spaces of business, government, religion, or education and still not be free. Most obviously, such women are not free from physical or psychic violence. Like women confined to the domestic sphere, they are subject to abuse, rape, harassment, or exploitation—sometimes even more so because their presence in the public sphere threatens the status quo, therefore making them an open, viable target. Such women are also subject to cycles of production and consumption that keep them overworked in order to remain in debt. Similar to early 20th century sharecroppers and mill workers, women are caught within a system where they toil for one-third of each day for the least amount of compensation that the employer can provide and still find employees, and where they then must spend at least another third of each day

converting those wages into overpriced goods and services. (The remaining third may be used for rest, provided the woman has no domestic duties or requires no outlets for intellectual or creative development.) The wages, however, never equal the amounts charged for goods and services, forcing the woman into paying “on credit” with an interest rate that precludes ever making good on her debt. It is true that males in our society face similar pressures; however, goods and services classified as necessary for them are kept at a minimum. For example, a man may live a happy, socially acceptable lifestyle by purchasing only soap, deodorant, a razor, shampoo, toothpaste, and a toothbrush for personal hygiene products, whereas a woman is required to have these items along with hair conditioner, mousse or gel, a variety of face paints and creams, separate lotions for the rest of the body along with loofahs for filing down her rougher edges, and a large collection of tweezers, picks, clippers, and depilatories for removing or taming unwanted hair/nail growth. A suggested solution for breaking the cycle of debt is to combine incomes with males whose needs for goods and services are significantly lower, yet this returns women to the domestic sphere, bringing their search for freedom full circle back to a trap.

For a woman to be free, she must also be immune to the various social pressures that attempt to control her thoughts and behavior. Certainly, as argued above, the pressure to remain within the domestic sphere is great, especially as it proceeds from all directions of a woman’s life: family, friends, church, school, the government, and the media. Such entities also attempt to confine women socially, creatively, and intellectually, much like a skillful gardener might tame the potentially great bonsai tree into a tiny, delicate dwarf. These controls work primarily by convincing women that they are inadequate to all of life’s conditions and tasks, through a process that begins in childhood and continues until the female has internalized a message that she can then pass along to other females. Messages broadcast from outside play like a looped tape recording in the woman’s head until she becomes an instrument of broadcast herself. You are too fat, too thin, too ugly, too pretty, too smart, too dumb, too dark, too pale,

too sissy, too masculine, too angry, too silly, too aggressive, too weak, and the list goes on. Many women try to escape this litany by using means similar to those of the unhappy domestic sphere woman, that is, medication or other forms of numbing, shopping in particular. A multitude of goods and services have been created to assist a woman in overcoming her too-this-or-that problem. This, of course, has the potential of leading women into the aforementioned cycle of debt with its concomitant problems. Many women are also counseled to compensate for their shortcomings by drawing upon the assistance of a better-equipped male, but this leads, of course, back around to domesticity. (The fact that women are said to reason in a circular fashion rather than linearly must come as no surprise by now. The material conditions of their lives—being shuttled from trap to trap—dictate that they should respond in this way.)

The fact that “free woman” is a concept defined only through negation strengthens my initial point: the world offers few, if any, safe places to be a free woman. A woman’s freedom exists in relation to something or someone else: home, job, men, or even the voices in her head put there by other women. A woman must be free from or free of *something*. Women run toward freedom by running away from *something*. A woman embraces freedom by renouncing *something*. The following two sections will define and explain the workings of that *something*, and from there, at last, we can begin to outline specifically how one goes about finding that elusive safe space where she might become a free woman.

3. Patriarchy: A Definition

I have previously used such terms as “the global economy,” “male sphere,” and “domestic space” in relation to one another and sometimes interchangeably. While these terms are indeed different, they can be classified together under the rubric of “patriarchy,” which I define as any agency that conspires, whether actively or passively, against female freedom and safety. Patriarchy, more specifically, is the system of laws, practices and behaviors designed by males for the benefit of males, a system that has

operated in a majority of nations/tribes since at least the beginning of recorded history. (Some even argue that the very concepts of “nation,” “tribe,” and “recorded history” are patriarchal themselves.) Whether true matriarchies existed before this time is a source of much debate, as is the belief that matriarchies provided any more safe places to be free women than patriarchies do. One might, for example, feel perfectly comfortable paying tribute to a fertility goddess on one day and forcing the nearest female to have sexual relations against her will on the next.

As I have said before, the world’s various feminist movements have made many advances; they have not, however, managed to do more than shake a feeble stick in the face of an apathetic, recalcitrant, and often downright hostile patriarchy. Ahh, patriarchy! It is a conspiracy theorist’s worst nightmare. From birth, women have fathers, lovers, and husbands curtailing their freedom and threatening their safety. The only recourse beyond this male-ruled domestic sphere is an assortment of authority figures—teachers, preachers, doctors, therapists, social workers, and legal system lackeys—who, even when they are female, are limited in their ability to help women because of the laws, beliefs, and practices that patriarchy has set in place. Beyond that one finds the world of work and once again the global economy—all patriarchal and all designed, as we have seen, to send women back to the domestic sphere where they can be monitored and controlled more easily. Patriarchy permeates all aspects of our very existence. We find it in our myths, our art, our entertainment, our languages and especially in our technology, which threatens with increasing frequency and agility to monitor, control, and modify all aspects of our daily lives. Ahh, patriarchy! If it does not run you over like a speeding train, it sits immobile as granite in your path or infiltrates the air you breathe like some unseen but deadly pathogen.

Patriarchy is indeed hazardous to a woman’s mental and physical health. Patriarchy even harms many men, forcing them to conform to models of behavior that befit ancient warriors perhaps but not necessarily human beings living in a modern society. What practical needs are served by being

unfeeling, aggressive, violent, acquisitional, territorial, obsessive about order, control, and rationality at all times and all places? Men who do not fit this model are often less free and safe than women, who at least have an excuse (because they are female) for not conforming. Men who do not fit this model often find themselves hunted down and killed. Patriarchy also harms the planet—threatening, ironically, all people male and female (and is it any wonder that we call the planet we use and abuse “Mother Earth”?). The cold desire for more—whether space, money, power—leads to war, to nuclear, chemical, or biological arms that can kill us all along with our enemies. The cold desire for more leads to corporations whose practices go unchecked as they exploit workers, destroy land and trees, pollute the air and water in order to produce goods and services that most people do not need in the first place. More cars, more clothes, more electronic equipment, more means of hoarding and exchanging money for the most powerful, and therefore the most harmful, of the patriarchs. The cold desire for more has blinded patriarchy to the need for women’s freedom and safety, and strangely enough, to its own. Yet, for some unknown reason, and despite (once again) the feminist movement’s many advances, patriarchy continues to rule everyone’s lives. Rarely is it called into question, and then the questioners themselves are doubted (or laughed at, or punished). Patriarchy, like water to a fish, is the sociopoliticalmilitaryindustrialtechnomedia-religious matrix that surrounds us without being noticed.

4. Ways to Combat Patriarchy: Their Advantages and Disadvantages

The way I see it, a woman has three choices, each a kind of death. She can kill herself, refusing to live in a world not of her making and certainly not for her benefit. Yet, then she would be dead, neither safe nor free. A woman can also learn to be complicit by joining patriarchy, perhaps as one of the red suits who cling to the coattails of the old boys in their network. With today’s modern technology, there is no reason to suppose that patriarchy must be confined to one gender. There are in fact, many

female patriachs in operation today, even some calling themselves feminists while making clearly anti-woman arguments: the feminist movement itself harms women, those who criticize patriarchy are cry-baby victims who want special privileges when everyone knows that white males are really the ones under attack in our society, and, hey, being domestic sphere chattel can be hip and fun! I would call such statements hogwash, but that would insult the hogs; most of them know better than to be cannibalistic. Some women do choose to cannibalize themselves, joining patriarchy as its version of womanhood. They fit neatly into one of two proscribed categories—virginwifemother or trophyloverwhore—where they might somewhat successfully live out their days dependent upon a man’s good will to keep them clothed and fed. Successfully, that is, until they get too old (approximately 40) or too fat (approximately 130 pounds) to continue holding the man’s attention, at which point they must have their flesh removed or tightened in order to attract another male supporter who is more than likely truly old and fat himself.

A woman who does not choose to join or die might instead fight openly. She can become an activist and risk the censure of family, friends, and all points of the sociopolitical-militaryindustrialtechnomediareligious matrix. Name-calling is their first line of offense: Bitch! Manhater! Lesbian! Shriill, selfish, strident, politically correct feminist! Most women fear such name-calling so greatly that they never make it to the activist stage, choosing instead to join patriarchy at the outset, medicating themselves to survive emotionally, and hoping for the best (i.e., a man who will leave them alone in the domestic sphere yet not leave them stranded). Many women, in fact, join in the name-calling so as to increase numbers in their own ranks; activists, after all, make women who conspire with patriarchy look silly. If name-calling does not work to put the activist down, patriarchy turns to more subtle means. Seduction has been known to be effective, as have coercion, bribery, threats, emotional and physical intimidation, and as a last resort (one hopes), outright destruction of one’s career, family,

soul, or physical body. Some women have fought openly with weapons, but they have been, shall we say, removed—swiftly and with little comment.

Most ways of combating patriarchy have been proven ineffective. To demonstrate, let me ask you this: how many women do you know who have battled the matrix and won? How many women have directly challenged the status quo powers that be and lived to tell about it? Some, perhaps, but their numbers are very small. For every outspoken woman you offer me, I will present you with two sacrificed on the altar of public opinion. It is a simple equation, really: Gloria Steinem = Joyce Elders + Lani Guinier. Political personalities aside, consider the women you know in your daily life—your mother, grandmother, sister, cousin, friend. Whom do you know that has dared challenge patriarchy? What happened to her? Was she called a name? Was she seduced or coerced into silence? If she somehow managed not to be, was she shunned by those around her? How about ignored? What about the women who did not challenge patriarchy? Are they happy? Can you say that they genuinely enjoyed their role as domestic chattel or trophy babe or two-thirds-paid worker? What woman do you know who feels fully respected, encouraged, safe, and free? Clearly, most women are not, but clearly too, most means of combating the powers that position them so can harm a woman mentally and physically. I have outlined above three ways to fight patriarchy, and I have noted that each is a kind of death. The only other choice is the path I myself have taken: covert warfare from the margins. Even this, however, has its risks.

5. One Free Woman's Solution: Warfare From the Margins

Three years ago, I opted out of the sociopoliticalmilitaryindustrialtechnomediareligious matrix, using a series of what I call “tactical maneuvers.” I have changed my name and thereby reclaimed my Self from those who would try to narrow me within the confines of an inherited patriarchy. I carry a name I have chosen and not one passed on to me because some male merely contributed DNA to my

genetic sequence. This, of course, remains theoretically problematic. I cannot renounce men, nor do I want to. A male's DNA is part of my code, and I must interact with males even while off the grid.

Please note that I have no problem with individual men; one of my best friends is one. It is the patriarchal system which exploits us all, women and some men alike, that I have, so to speak, a beef with.

I must also operate within a language system that is itself patriarchal. Even if I change my name, my choices are limited to sounds and signs in service to the matrix. Until someone invents a new, woman-friendly language, I must work with what I have. This first tactical maneuver also involves abandoning or scrambling all forms of identity markers. I have no bank account or credit cards, dealing in cash only so that I cannot be tracked. I do have a fake driver's license and passport (both easily obtained) should the occasion arise for me to need them. I have thereby reclaimed my privacy from the various entities that would try to make me a public persona, therefore a visible one, and therefore subject to the controlling and monitoring hand of the patriarchal matrix. Have you ever noticed how often you are watched through surveillance cameras? How your purchases and your movements can be tracked through credit and debit cards? How your home computer (and soon your television) can profile you so that advertisers, and goddess only knows who else, can *target* you more effectively? Those who argue for such monitoring claim that it exists for our convenience or safety or privacy, that it does not negatively affect our freedom, but remember what happened to the women in 1984, in *Brave New World*, and in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Almost daily, these frightening fictions more closely resemble self-fulfilling prophecies of reality.

My second tactical maneuver has been to claim a space for myself outside known (and, therefore, subject to being monitored and controlled) boundaries. I inhabit forty acres on the border between Florida and Georgia, where one patriarch's private hunting ground meets another's, where ancient waters rise out of nowhere and form a highway of rivers to the Gulf of Mexico. My land is inherited, passed

down to me from my mother, from her mother before her, cast off from my grandfather when his pecan grove went sterile in a sudden blight. But a nearby field remained fertile, and the women maintained it as a secret refuge for anyone who needed to get away. They tended wildflowers by the thousands: in the drier spots, tall goldenrod, yarrow, periwinkle, honeysuckle, lantana in pink and white and yellow; and down the rise, around the pond, yaupon holly, butterwort, and hooded pitcher plants. They grew a few herbs and vegetables for “pin money,” too—bills fastened into dresses or tucked into cupboards, “just in case.” Through a combination of chance and, no doubt, some female chicanery, this land has never been surveyed correctly. The patriarchs alongside me have holdings so old and so vast that they do not know I am here. And I am so far back in the margins that even the maps are not right. Commercial ones show a blank space, missing both the county roads to the north and south of me. Topographical maps show a white space too, right under a staple in the gazetteers, inside what they describe as a swath of swampy wetlands that bleed into the river, not the rolling wildflower hills surrounded by live oaks and pines that I call home. If you are looking to get off the grid, this place is the answer to a prayer. The militia-men can keep Montana, and the country boys waiting to survive an apocalypse can have their Appalachian chain; I have found my dreamworld in my own back yard.

My third tactical maneuver is the natural outgrowth of the first and second. By claiming my Self and claiming my Place, I renounce the system that exploits me. Although I inhabit a space that is by nature domestic, it is one neither presided over by patriarchy nor controlled by the global economy. The matrix, in fact, does not even know I am here. I grow most of my own food (vegetables, fruits, legumes) and barter with another off-grid neighbor for the rest (meat, meal, dairy, and sugar). My waste goes to the garbage dump, the compost heap, and a homemade composting toilet. My water comes from a well that taps into an underground spring, and my electricity is stolen from power lines that run nearby. What mail I receive goes to a post office box in the closest town. Other communications are handled through

an e-mail account I set up through free Internet connections available at a nearby library (even in virtual reality, I live in the margins). What little money I need for clothing or transportation, I earn off the fruits of my labor and land. By dealing in cash and living a life of voluntary simplicity, I remain uncircumscribed by the global economy's vicious circles. This is the only effective means that I have found to remain a safe, free woman, and I am prepared to defend my place to the death. Only being found out or killed (the same thing, really) will make me leave my home.

6. A Brief Cost-Benefit Analysis

This is not to say that my way of life avoids pain. Becoming a free woman requires much sacrifice. Relationships were the first to go. I must keep friends and family at a distance, and a lover is out of the question. Clouding my head with hormonally induced notions of happily ever after or even happy for the next fifteen minutes brings unnecessary risk. Heterosexual love is a patriarchal invention anyway, designed to provide men with a vehicle for satisfying their lusts and getting their laundry done, often at the same time. Homosexual love does not fare much better, being either socially suspect (remember how visibility subjects one to monitoring and control) or doomed to fall into heterosexual paradigms (remember how this leads to domestic slavery). Someone always gets left, and someone always winds up responsible for the supper dishes. Love, in any fashion, compromises an individual's freedom and safety, especially as it offers the possibility of betrayal at its close—a possibility that I am not yet prepared to face. I have worked long and hard to become a safe, free woman, and I am not about to let a disgruntled former partner hand me over to the matrix. A human being's natural physical needs are a potential problem with my way of life, but so far they have been nothing I could not handle with a AA battery.

With a few exceptions, therefore, my life is maintained with simple necessities: food, clothing, and shelter. I own a canoe and a small truck—the only vehicles suitable for entering and exiting my property—but no television, telephone, or radio. I do not read newspapers and magazines. Why should I subject myself to anti-freewoman brainwashing? I already know what the media wants to tell me: Be pretty and thin and nice. Make bread but not waves. Make men feel good about themselves while running an efficient household, instilling cultural norms and values into future generations, making sure the generation in decline passes those years in comfort, and holding down a well-paying job with excellent benefits and advancement potential. And don't forget to smile! If I had kept listening to what friends, lovers, family, and the rest of our esteemed public had told me for the first thirty years of my life, I would wind up in the general state of most women in our new millennium. Suffering from depression and mysterious ailments like chronic fatigue syndrome. Living off Prozac and Stairmaster. Small wonder that so many women die from too much pressure in their blood flow and hearts that explode. Small wonder that they die from cancers that attack the very organs that make them female. I don't want any part of that. When I go, I want it to be quick and dramatic: as a suicide bomber for freedom and safety, perhaps, but certainly not eaten alive, slowly, by womanhood.

So, yes, there is a price to pay for my way of life, but the rewards are more than worth it. I admit to a certain amount of loneliness and paranoia, yet I feel sound in body and spirit, knowing that I do the necessary work of social change (in my limited sphere, at least). Last year I made \$12,000 from a little herb business I run on the side, giving as little as possible to patriarchal matrix. After spending \$600 on food and medicine, \$1400 on vehicle maintenance (gas, oil, new tires, and a new cv joint), \$2000 on home repair and beautification (most of that on garden supplies and replacement tin for my roof after a particularly bad storm), \$500 on gifts and entertainment (yes, I do have friends and we do get together for the occasional beer), about half that amount on used clothing from the army surplus store, and another

thousand on who knows what, I cleared \$6,250 that I deposited in air-tight, waterproof containers and hid in various undesirable to search locations. If I chose to, I could leave tomorrow for Paris, Rome or Timbuktu—if I chose to. Who among you could say that? And who could say that she is truly free to be who she wants to be, to work and play as she wants to work and play, to look the way she wants to look, to think what she wants to think, to make the choices she wants to make? Who among you can say that she is a free woman? For right now at least, I know that I am.

7. How Many Battles Win the War

I do not argue that you should follow my path. If you want to be free, you must create your own, using the resources that you have and those you can take by hook or crook. You have to set out by asking what you truly need and what you can cast off. You must figure out who you are. A simple wilderness trek or solo vacation can help you get started. You would be surprised what you can learn from relying on your instincts and the few possessions you can carry on your back. My quest started on a hiking trip after a bad breakup. I left the northeastern city where I had lived since college and set out for the Appalachian Trail, with nothing but a tent, a sleeping bag, a camp stove with gas, a pump and container for water, food, matches, a Swiss army knife, a change of underwear, my journal, and a pen. My cheek was bruised from where my lover had hit me, and my heart was in more pain from realizing I had let him abuse me for a year. (He wouldn't get so angry, he said, if I didn't try to act so smart all the time.) I was afraid to be alone at first. A woman alone is fair game, I thought. But then I wondered, fair game for what? Was I afraid of being physically attacked? Was I afraid of being forced to have sex? These things had already happened to me when I was doing what society said I should, pair bonding with a handsome, respectable young man in a high-paying, corporate job. Was I afraid of being killed? I was already dead inside. For two days I went through the motions of surviving: waking up, making food, cleaning up,

walking, and watching the birds, squirrels, raccoons, deer, frogs, snakes, and ants doing the same things I did. Three days of watching made me realize that I *was* surviving, and doing quite well. I had no one telling me how to act, how to dress, what to think, who to be, and I liked it that way. The voices in my head, when they were not replaced by hoots and rustles, and splashes, and chirps, and burps, did not matter on the trail, and I liked that too.

After a week in the woods, my spirit was full for the first time in my life. One cannot live on intangible nourishment alone, however, so I went into town for something to eat. Walking through the superstore, I saw women who looked like zombies, eyes glazed and mouths open as they combed the aisles for junk food and junk novels; disposable plastic kitchen aides and children's toys; bottles, boxes, and and bags of cleansers and colors to wind up, one way or another, flushed into their water supply. Trash! All of it! How many hours each day do women spend purchasing, arranging, worrying about trash? Women, indeed, *are* our society's garbage containers. It is our job to contain every piece of shit that is flung our way. Some man's crap? Thank you, sir, may I have another? The world's scut work? Thank you, sir, may I have another? The endless supply of psychic and bodily wastes that we are asked to care for day in and day out? More, sir, pleeease? But the woods had left me more than full: I was fed up—I needed, and would take, no more shit. Back at camp, I set my mind to work. Where could I go and what could I do to nourish myself in all senses of the word? I remembered the abandoned field mother used to take me to as a child. There was a cabin to fix up, plenty of land to grow fruits and vegetables on, a bass pond and a forest to supply meat. I could live there economically and be responsible for no one's shit but my own. All I needed was to borrow a little money and a few tools, and I could be home free.

Before I left, I took a swim in a nearby stream and rechristened myself Fredonia, a name once suggested for a new, free country, one we know now as the good old U.S. of A. There are towns all

across America named Fredonia, even one in Arizona that was supposed to be some sort of refuge for Mormon women back in the early days. Fredonia sounded just fine to me. Fredonia Woolf. After Virginia of course. She was not free, really, but she explained better than anyone had yet why a woman needed to be. It was the explaining that killed her. She knew that freedom was out there, she knew what one had to do to get it, and she even drew the road map you might say, but she could only go so far in real life. She was like Tantalus by the pool in Hades. Put there because he was too arrogant for the gods, he watched the cool, fresh water retreat before he could quench his thirst, and the round, ripe pomegranates disappear as he reached out to satisfy his hunger. Rather than stand there like Tantalus, unsatisfied forever, Virginia said to hell with that and took a nose dive into Styx. At least she went out on her own terms. And this, metaphorically speaking, is what I advocate for all women. I do not believe any woman should physically harm herself, especially if she is strong and has something to say. More of us can certainly make a difference somehow. However, if our only choice in this world—one, I reiterate, made neither by us or for us—if our only choice is death of some form, then let us retreat from that world and make one anew. Let us be dead to the world, but not because of it. Let us be dead to the world, but not to our own souls. Let us be dead to the influence of the patriarchal matrix and reborn on our own terms as women. If we have been granted no safe spaces to be free, then we must create our own, one free woman at a time, until one by one, little by little, those spaces begin to connect, grow, crowd out, trample upon, overtake, and—dare I say it?—*devour* the patriarchal deathspaces that threaten us now. Chew them up, swallow them, and excrete them from the world forever. Perhaps we may find this more filling nourishment than all the crap we have had to swallow before.

8. Fredonia Woolf Prepared to Fight

From the margins, I prepare myself for war. With every piece of worldly skin I slough off, I rebuild a free woman. A woman who is free from pain, free from abuse, free from the rules of womanhood that want to cage me, tame me, kill me and mount me on the wall. I answer to no one here. No lover, no children, no traditional family values. No debts. No boss. No laws. No god.

I am Fredonia Woolf. I am thirty-three years old. I am five feet, five inches tall and weigh 135 pounds. My hair is brown and coarse like Georgia wiregrass. My skin is Florida sand. My eyes are a blackwater swamp, with my soul a clear blue spring. I am a sturdy longleaf pine with the alligator's quickness on land or water. I have the bald eagle's vision, the raccoon's cunning, and the water moccasin's bite. No one calls me nice. No one calls me pretty. No one tells me to be quiet, but I am while I hide in the saw palmetto. Seminole still, no rustling yet. Just watching. Waiting. Ready to rise.