

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Forbidden Flowers

Nancy Friday

About the Author

Nancy Friday is the author of several important and best-selling titles, including *My Secret Garden*, *Men in Love* and *Women on Top* (available in Arrow). She lives in Key West, Florida, and in Connecticut.

By the same author

My Secret Garden
My Mother, My Self
Men In Love
Jealousy

Women On Top
The Power of Beauty
Our Looks, Our Lives

FORBIBBEN FLOWERS

More Women's Sexual Fantasies

Nancy Friday



arrow books

This eBook is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorised distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and publisher's rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Epub ISBN: 9781407089973

Version 1.0

www.randomhouse.co.uk

Reissued by Arrow Books in 2003

9 10

Copyright © Nancy Friday 1994

Nancy Friday has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1998 to be identified as the author of this work

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding of cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

First published in Great Britain in 1975 by
Pocket Books

Arrow Books
Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA

www.rbooks.co.uk

Addresses for companies within The Random House Group Limited can be found at: www.randomhouse.co.uk/offices.htm

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9780099462422

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that are printed on Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper procurement policy can be found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment.

Printed in the UK by CPI Bookmarque, Croydon, CR0 4TD

This book belongs to the women whose letters fill it. Many wrote to question their own sexuality, others to confirm it. From them all, I have learned about my own.

-N.F.

"Your book *My Secret Garden* reduces women to men's sexual level."

- Dr Theodore I. Rubin, to
Nancy Friday, in NBC radio
interview, 1973

"Aren't women entitled to a little lust too?" - Nancy Friday's
reply

Contents

AN INTRODUCTION

PART ONE: WHERE DO SEXUAL FANTASIES COME FROM?

Chapter One: *Childhood*

Dorothy, Carla and Tom, Jennie, Sarah, Claudia, Janice, Denise, Frank, Lana, Robyn, Ivy, Bonnie, Sophie, Dr. John Harrison, Deedee, Loretta, Sharon, Brenda, Gena, Joyce

Chapter Two: *Adolescence*

Sis, Beth Anne, Penelope, Jenny, Veevee, Katherine, Muffie, Carina, June, Tina, Toby, Penny, Cecillia, Isabel

Chapter Three: *Looking*

Roxanne, Sharon, Molly, Jackie, Sally, Marylou

Chapter Four: *Frustration*

Laura, Biba, Lyle, Dot, Gloria, Callie, Arlene, Bunny, Sherri, Ginger, Ricky, Stella, Jill

PART TWO: THE USES OF SEXUAL FANTASY

Chapter Five: *Daydreaming*

Lulu, Jackie, Ethel, Samantha, Debbie, Connie, Elaine, Sophie, Killie, Libby, Phyllis, Marilyn, Moreen, Janet, Lucia, Lilly, Wilma Jean

Chapter Six: *Masturbation*

Emma, Venice, Libby, Dorothy, Liberated Lady,
Noranna, Fanny, Liz, Anonymous, Diane, Cecilia,
Carole, Gabbie, Isolde

Chapter Seven: *During Sex*

Lynn, Jan, Isabel, Kate, Helen, Riva, Beth,
“Shoulders,” Monica, Delia, Daisy, Vi

Chapter Eight: *Dreams Come True*

Carolyn, May, Chessie, Rose Ann, Nessie, Kellie, Lizzy,
Joni

AFTERWORD

An Introduction

Dear Nancy:

I finished your book this morning, and all I can say is Thank God someone opened my eyes to this aspect of human sexuality while I am still young enough to be just at the beginning of my sexual life. Your book has totally changed my way of thinking. I am seventeen and until a few months ago, had had intercourse with only one person – my boyfriend of two years. Perhaps that is why I have fantasized so much during our sessions. But whatever the reason, it always made me feel guilty, unfaithful, perverted – and I suppose this negative feeling about myself was another factor which kept me from enjoying sex with him.

Reading *My Secret Garden* has shown me in the clearest terms that sex and fantasies are not something to be endured, but to be enjoyed. Your book has chopped years off the time it would have taken me to make these discoveries for myself. Thank you for allowing me to be reborn sexually before it was too late to change my beliefs, and before I got clogged down forever in sexual guilt.

Sincerely,
Mary

Sexual mores and practices have shown an age-old resistance to change. Today, there is hardly any part of human behaviour we are more willing to question and alter. The acceptance of new ideas of what is sexually okay is now

so immediate you'd think entire generations had been holding their breath – people being born, living, and dying, yet never daring to explore their own sexuality, afraid that only she/he ever felt certain erotic desires, only he/she was aberrant and everyone else was “normal.” Then, suddenly, The Word is out; without seeming to pause for even a sigh of relief, everybody knows without further discussion that it is not only okay, but that it has always been okay.

To suggest you ever questioned it is to show what a hopeless square you were to begin with. It took years for Kinsey's findings in the '40s to make their full cultural impact, but the revolution Masters and Johnson introduced in the '60s was immediately accepted as not revolutionary at all. Right away, their findings became part of everyone's workaday bedroom knowledge. “Sure, what else is new?”

Oral sex, for example. In the '50s, I almost fainted when a man suggested it. Yet I almost fainted with pleasure when he did it. Today, who would dare suggest that oral sex was bad, dirty, perverted – or even unusual?

During the five years I was compiling material for *My Secret Garden*, I could not find a doctor or psychiatrist who would intelligently discuss women's sexual fantasies. It was still a taboo subject. In 1968, before I decided to write the book, I did some research in the giant New York Public Library and the even larger British Museum library in London. In the millions upon millions of cards on file in these two vast repositories of practically everything ever written in the English language, I did not find a single book or magazine article that dealt with the subject, even though, by definition, women's sexual fantasies were of more than intellectual interest to one-half of the human race.

I spoke to at least a dozen psychiatrists in both the United States and Great Britain. The most any of these learned

men would concede was that perhaps some women did have sexual fantasies when they masturbated; otherwise, they said, the phenomenon was limited to the sexually frustrated and/or to the pathological. They took the initial fact that a woman had sexual fantasies as a sign of sickness. The idea that a happily married woman, sexually satisfied by a beloved husband, might still have erotic pictures in mind – perhaps of another man, perhaps of ten other men – was totally foreign to their ideas of feminine “mental health.” Too often in these discussions, the medical mask would slip, and I would find myself facing not the calm professional but the outraged man. The disgusted son, husband and father would look at me – surely a hoax cleverly disguised as a “nice woman” – with ill-concealed anxiety and dislike. “You are entitled to your subjective opinions. Miss Friday. But have you any medical qualifications to back up your ideas?”

As late as February 1973, the noted “permissive” Dr. Allen Fromme would take a similar position in daring *Cosmopolitan* magazine. “Women do not have sexual fantasies,” Dr. Fromme wrote, and went on with patronizing kindness: “How do we know? Ask a woman, and she will usually reply, No. The reason for this is obvious: women haven’t been brought up to enjoy sex . . . women are by and large destitute of sexual fantasy.”

Needless to say, this reinforced the need to deny the practice of sexual fantasy among the millions of Cosmo Girls who read these words, not only when talking to eminent medicos like Dr. Fromme but even to themselves. *Of course*, most women told Dr. Fromme that they did not have sexual fantasies; no woman wanted to be thought sexually “weird” when faced with what seemed to be expert medical opinion, that if she did, she was totally outside the “normal” experience of her sisters. Dr. Fromme may have thought he was being merely descriptive. In fact, he was being normative. A self-fulfilling prophet.

Yet an example of the almost frightening speed with which the experts can revise their ideas on contemporary sexual dos and don'ts was printed in the same magazine in February 1975. When a practising New York psychoanalyst and *Cosmo's* own monthly psychiatric-advice columnist could say this:

“. . . all women have sexual fantasies, though sometimes they won't admit it, even to themselves. Fantasies are make-believe states used to enhance reality. A woman making love to one man may imagine that several other men are watching. . . . Her fantasy provides a safe way to explore the erotic possibilities of a situation that might be very threatening or guilt-producing if she acted it out.”

The psychoanalyst goes on to say: “A fantasy can give a woman an added sense of life and all its possibilities. It is the *unexamined* corners of the mind that breed neurosis and fear – not the portions of ourselves we know, recognize and accept.”

When *My Secret Garden* was published, I was happy to find other doctors coming forward to support my feelings that sexual fantasies were not necessarily a sign of neurosis, but were, instead, a sign of a woman's sexual exuberance and life. Dr. Leonard Cammer, chairman, Section on Psychiatry, Medical Society of the State of New York, endorsed my views, as did the noted founder and executive director of SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S.), Dr. Mary Calderone. And yet the anxiety that the subject aroused in many medical men would not abate: the validity of my statistical methods was attacked. “But all the women you talked to volunteered to do so,” was the way this objection usually ran. “They are a self-selected sample. How can you extrapolate from what these exhibitionistic volunteers tell you? How can you say that their experiences are also shared by their sisters in the silent majority?”

This same argument was used against Kinsey and Masters and Johnson when their research was published, but time

has proven that their studies not only voiced the views of the people who volunteered but also spoke for the broad spectrum of Americans in general. In addition, I note no reluctance in the works of psychoanalysts themselves, beginning with Freud, to base their theories of human nature on that tiny fraction of the human race that has laid itself bare on the analytic couch. The vast majority of the human race has never figured in any psychoanalytic survey or clinical documentation of human behavior – and still any psychoanalyst you talk to will unhesitatingly tell you “all” people pass through certain stages of the Oedipus complex. It is my feeling that if over two thousand women from all parts of the country, of all ages, marital status, and economic classes write that they have these or those sexual fantasies that make them feel this way or that, their feelings and experiences are going to be shared by the great majority of women. “In my practice,” says Dr. Sonya Friedman, a Detroit clinical psychologist and marriage counselor, “I am continually struck by how much more we are alike than we are different.”

In the end, I must leave the validity of what I am saying to you, the reader, to judge. If this book awakens no resonance in you, if you feel no recognition or empathy between yourself and the women who speak in these pages, it is not that you are odd – it is only that I am wrong about you. But for the rest of my readers, I offer the message that is contained in almost every letter I have received. “Thank God you opened the discussion about women’s sexual fantasies. I thought I was the only one who had these ideas. I was afraid to tell my husband [priest, doctor, or whoever], because I was afraid he would think I was some kind of weird freak. I felt like a pervert, so guilty and alone. . . .” My message is, Welcome. You are not alone.

I believe it is individual anxiety that makes so many people unable to accept the idea of sexual fantasy in others. The portrait of women it evokes is too new, too frightening –

above all, too much at war with all our past stereotypes of women as maidens, mothers, “ladies.” People laugh nervously when the subject of *My Secret Garden* and sexual fantasies comes up. Some people turn red and tell me they never read pornography or else they nervously light a cigarette and dismiss the whole subject as “boring.” When *Garden* was published, I became depressed by the anxiety/dismissal/mirth the book aroused in many women and men, friends and strangers. My husband helped me. “Freud was dismissed as a scandal and a dirty old man,” Bill said, “because he talked about masturbation and the sexuality of children. Up till then, people thought children were ‘pure’ as angels. When Freud talked about sex and incestuous desires, he was called a pornographer too.” Of course, I am in no way comparing my work or myself to Freud; but I do think we are living through a time of sexual history as emotionally loaded as Freud’s own. By trying to understand the secret thoughts of women – the emerging sex – we may succeed in unscrambling the sexual bigotry of the past. Only in this way will we be able to understand the distorted man-woman relationship that has led to the frightening anger between the sexes today. I hope this book will help.

Our real world . . . from the morning paper to the late late television movie . . . is saturated with commercial sex, romantic sex, and, yes, violent sex. These emotions and images stay in our minds – along with all the other desires and drives we are born with. What is a woman to do with all these ideas? One thing she does is shape them closer to her heart’s desire, using the sexual stimuli she likes, softening or discarding the images that turned her off, inventing her own sexual fantasies. If these reveries stimulate her sexually while she goes about her daily routine, I’m all for it.

If a few lustful and erotic reveries make the housework go by “as if in a dream,” why not?

Probably the most important thing to remember about fantasies is that they are not facts, not deeds; they are not “acting out.” Summoning up an erotic image in the imagination does not necessarily mean we want to bring it into reality. In fact, very often the fantasy itself discharges the forbidden energy and entirely eschews the need for acting out. In the same way that dreams at night can be said to be psychotic discharges of the mind that allow us to be sane during the day, fantasies of even the most primitive, regressive nature help us to be adult and responsible in our real behavior.

If anyone, man or woman, lives out Freud’s dictum that a fulfilled life contains both love and work, I don’t care what fantasies that person has. If a woman has daydreams of making it with Napoleon’s horse, but says she is satisfied with her life, who am I, or who is any doctor, to tell her that she is strange?

Today, for the first time in history, women are encouraging each other to be more sexually free and accepting. As we do, is it surprising that men are now becoming the first line of defense against the breakup of the old morality? It is men who have become wary and critical of women’s new role as sexual initiator and free agent. “Love” itself is suddenly raised as the banner under which many men march. “Don’t you love me anymore?” suddenly asks the husband who always claimed that his own casual philanderings “have nothing to do with my wife,” when he learns that she has been having a little afternoon peccadillo of her own . . . or, yes, a sexual fantasy starring his best friend.

I find men’s sexual anxiety today understandable. I am sympathetic to it; women have changed so much in recent years. And men have not. In fact, if you are a woman who is not sympathetic to men today, and you call yourself a “liberated” woman, you should question your insensitivity.

Are you happier in your new freedom because it gives you a chance to “get back at men”. . . or because you see it as an opportunity at last to make things better for both of you? Sex never was the simple piece of cake Hugh Hefner sells to men; women’s questioning of a sexual status quo that was questionable to begin with must be disquieting if not threatening to men. I’m not saying that a lot of men – the *machos*, for instance – don’t deserve their discomfort. But a lot don’t. I suppose what it comes down to is that if you’re a woman who wants men in your life, you’ve got to take your responsibility along with your liberation.

The as-yet-unplotted possibilities of women’s sexuality, given almost surrealistically vivid form and image in fantasy, not only frightens men but women too. Think of all that desire unleashed, desire he may not be interested in or able to satisfy, appetites mother would never have approved of, sexual *power* she doesn’t know what to do with. (How many women know how to make the first move? Should she pick up the telephone, reach for his hand, his cock? Should she say, “Please, I want you to go down on me?” And how many men would reject her if she did? Oral sex may be “intellectually” accepted today, but as you will see from the women in this book – if you have not already discovered it for yourself – there are a great number of men who are unskilled, unpracticed, or unwilling to do what they say.)

We are not yet ready to accept the simple proposition that female sexual power added to male sexual power equals better sex for both. And yet the truth is that the foundation of our myth of male sexual superiority is riddled with deception and fakeroo. Worse, it gives the poor man who believes it an awful superman’s burden to carry. *Dominance* and *superiority* are words you use when you go to war, not to bed.

Henry Miller wrote me a letter about *My Secret Garden*. "I've always suspected that women had richer, wilder, fantasies than men. From my limited experience with women I must also add that I have found them more capable of abandoning themselves completely in intercourse than men. In a good healthy sense I would say, to use an old-fashioned word, that they are more 'shameless' than men . . . Men are only beginning to perceive the true nature of women's being. They have created a false image of her. She is neither an angel nor a bitch in heat. If she is no longer an enigma, she is certainly an everlasting source of wonder and rich in unexplored possibilities in every domain of life."

If I prefer Henry Miller's approach to women's fantasies to that of many psychiatrists, it is because his view of life is large enough to see fantasy as enriching human experience, and not the mark of pathology.

Far from being a perversion of our deepest and most intimate moments together, sexual fantasies answer the need for variety that exists in the best of relationships. To those who think it is a crime to consciously retreat into the secret garden of your mind while in the arms of your beloved, let me quote Dr. Ray Birdwhistle of the University of Pennsylvania. An overly closed idea of marriage, he says, leads to pathology. "Privacy is disallowed as being disloyal. But if the couple wants intimacy, both partners need to refresh themselves with privacy. That implies also being allowed to withdraw without guilt. It is only in the private kingdom of our mind that one can enjoy fantasies. And what held together romantic love in the first place? A rich, lusty, sweet and sad, vengeful and even violent fantasy life" [*New York* magazine, February 1973].

On the last page of *My Secret Garden*, I asked readers to contribute their own sexual fantasies and comments for the

book you now hold. It is from the shape these letters took that I have devised the form of this book. Part One deals with the very frequent question of readers, "Where Do Sexual Fantasies Come From?" Part Two, "The Uses of Sexual Fantasy" concerns the role these imaginary, erotic scenarios, play in the lives of many women.

As you will see, I have not so much tried to theorize on my own; I have tried instead to organize the material my readers sent in to illustrate the answers to these questions they have raised in their own lives. I believe we live in a time when it is of paramount importance that women learn to speak unashamedly, so that we may learn from each other. I did not ask my readers for all the information they sent me, but I am very grateful that they felt it "right" to try to trace for themselves, and me, the origin of their fantasies and the context in which they appear in their lives.

It is, of course, impossible to analyze any particular woman's fantasy without knowing her, and understanding the full meaning of why she has chosen a particular event or symbol to express her erotic excitement. But that was never my purpose. I began research for *My Secret Garden* in 1968 . . . I began work on this book in 1973. I wanted to see if the intervening five years had made any significant difference in the attitudes of women toward sexual fantasies. I am pleased to say that while I would characterize the majority of fantasies in *Garden* as various strategies women had devised to handle or disarm sexual guilt, the fantasies I have collected for this book are much more characterized by pleasure and guiltless exuberance. Poets are often called the conscience of a nation; I believe our sexual fantasies are mirrors of the women we would like to become.

I don't think anyone can read the letters in the pages that follow and not be touched as I was, not only by the feelings expressed but by the outpouring of honesty and the unglossy portrait they give of their lives. What impresses me most is that, although I guaranteed that all contributions

would be anonymous, over half the women who wrote signed their full names and gave their addresses - as contrasted to one woman in ten who signed her real name to the letters I had previously collected for *Garden* five years.

While I have kept my half of the agreement - all names, professions, geographical, and other too revealing biographical data have been changed - I am moved by the courage of my readers in wanting to speak to me without disguise. As one twenty-five-year-old woman wrote, "I believe that self-acceptance is the first step toward maturity. So that I can believe in myself, I want you to believe in me and what I wrote. And so I am signing my full name."

Part One

Where Do Sexual Fantasies Come From?

1

Childhood

It is evident that fantasies have value in and of themselves to the fantasizers. . . . From the time they were little girls, women have been told “not to think about such things.” By bringing women’s sexual thoughts into the open the book gives them permission to fantasize and, in so doing, increases the possibility that women thereby also derive permission to experience real life sex more fully, more easily, more rewardingly.

– Dr. Mary Calderone
Review of *My Secret Garden*
SIECUS Report, May 1974

In *My Secret Garden*, there was a chapter called, “Where Did a Nice Girl Like You Get an Idea Like That?” It put forth my feeling that many of our fantasies spring from a time long before the world is ready to acknowledge our sexuality – childhood itself. No great pioneering idea on my part, Freud’s work on infantile sexuality dates from the turn of the century. More recently, the eminent authority on childhood psychology, Dr. Arnold Gesell, conducted a study on infant behavior. He placed a fifty-six-week-old boy in front of a mirror, naked. What the child saw of his own body excited him so much that Dr. Gesell was able to photograph him with an erect penis. If a boy barely one year old can have an erotic experience, is it surprising that little girls – usually

more precocious than boys – can also be said to be sexual beings almost from birth?

And yet the idea is still unacceptable to most people. Childhood is pictured as a time of ribbons, fairy tales, and lemonade. Adults notoriously forget that they were once children too; they close off their minds to early sexual memories – those embarrassing or shameful events connected perhaps with anxieties about masturbation. I am not suggesting that the sugar and spice of little girls' childhoods are only a false facade. That aspect is real. But so is our sexuality.

So far, I have received over two thousand letters from women who sent me their sexual fantasies in response to the invitation on the last page of *My Secret Garden*. Many were from highly educated women; an equally great number were from people who probably never read Freud. It didn't matter. The cumulative truth of their personal experience confirmed my view that sexual fantasies are often born out of remembered childhood events. These letters cheered me in a very significant way: I loved the self-acceptance they showed, the refusal to continue to carry the age-old feminine burden of shame and guilt. "Let me tell you a bit about myself first," these openhearted letters often begin. The writers want me to see them as they are; they want some recognition for the courage with which so many of them lead their lives, even if they ask me not to print their names. "My first sexual experience was when I was about four years old. The little boy who lived next door came over and he . . . etc." No apologies are given, no anatomical details are glossed over or prettified. There is an intuitive understanding that ladylike language would be counter-productive to the purpose we are both striving for . . . that facts are facts and moral judgments are irrelevant. While names, geographical locations, and occupations in these letters have been changed, I have preserved all other biographical details. I feel only out of the richness and

density of facts about someone's life can we come to see that she is a woman just like ourselves.

I believe this is important work that women must do together, and I am glad that there are so many willing to lay their lives on the line to help tear down the curtain of silence behind which we have had to hide our erotic selves. It left each woman feeling isolated, an all-too-easy victim to the assumption that only men knew "all about" sex and what "a real woman" was. Behind this barrier, which was marked Innocence, but should more rightly have been named Ignorance, the sexual exploitation of women went on during practically all of recorded history - a time that, thanks to women's new openness and honesty with one another, is coming to an end.

Another significant difference between the letters of 1968 and these new ones is that in *Garden* the average age of the women who contributed was about thirty; they were of the generation born around the time of World War II. The world they grew up in was very different than today's. In that book, the greatest number of fantasies I collected centered around themes of imaginary force and rape, abduction, domination, the anonymous man whom the woman never sees again - all of which are psychological strategies for allowing the woman to have the most thrilling sexual experiences in her fantasies, but all under the slogan, "It wasn't my fault; he made me do it." In other words, *sexual guilt and its avoidance* was the great emotion shared by most women who contributed to *Garden*.

The average age of women who sent in their fantasies for inclusion in this book is about twenty-two. They grew up in the age in which Elvis Presley was bringing a new kind of blatant sexuality to pop music, they entered their own sexual years to the songs of the Beatles. I am not saying that the music of their time directly influenced their approach to life (although often it did), as much as it reflected a whole new era of freedom of sexual expression.

The fantasies in this book fill me with admiration for these young women. I am struck by their pride in their sexuality and their pleasure in its exercise – if not in their lives, at least in their fantasies. They are not at all frightened by the sexuality of their earliest years. They aren't into guilt at all.

In memory, there is security. One of the first signs that infants are maturing is the ability to allow mother out of their sight without tears of fear or rage. The baby has begun to believe in the reality of memory – to recognize there is a correspondence between her inner world and the reality “out there.” Remembered figures do not vanish into a void, but come back. In time, the baby is freed by this inner certainty and reliance upon memory; she comes to enjoy her periods of solitude. Secure in a base of remembered happiness, the little child can turn her attention forward to learning new things: how to crawl around her crib, perform experiments with her toys and/or body, the pleasures of watching patterns of light cross the ceiling.

So it is in our sexual years. Whenever periods of sexual boredom, anxiety, or frustration come along, we tend to return to childhood scenes of remembered erotic happiness. These will be images or events that happen to the baby that are of an erotic nature. Something is imagined or felt by the little girl, something comes into view that stimulates her. The child does not yet know, nor does she need to know, that these are specifically sexual feelings. She only knows that they make her *feel good* . . . excited, stimulated, flushed with life. Nobody has yet told her she is not to touch herself “down there” . . . that she is not supposed to look at this or think that or do any of the other 999 things that “nice little girls” do not do. She goes over the stimulating incident again and again in memory, almost as a form of sympathetic magic to make the experience recur; it is the

same form of primitive logic that made the cavemen draw pictures of deer when they wanted to meet them on the hunt.

This is truly our Age of Innocence. The knowledge of good and evil (conventionally viewed) had not yet been forced upon us. Is it any wonder that we withdraw to these happy memories, these simple joys, during our grown-up times of stress, frustration, or boredom? We were safe and felt alive then; memory allows us again to draw upon these emotions in fantasy.

Unfortunately, it is a period of childhood that does not last long. Very soon the little girl begins to notice that when she says this or does that her parents frown or quickly change the subject. The long series of don'ts are laid on her; the very lack of explanation behind these illogical commands makes them more frightening and ominous. She becomes aware that various aspects of her thought or behavior are not to be mentioned. She learns concealment and evasion – but in her mind, at least, *she does not stop having these ideas that make her feel good*. They are too exciting to give up. Guilt and silence turn her memories into fantasies. Again and again, I receive the wildest, most ravenously erotic fantasies from women who begin by writing, “I was very strictly brought up by puritanic parents. . . .”

But while guilt is a heavy load to carry, it is not without innate benefits too; it adds a terrific charge of daring and defiance to sex, of forbidden thrills and excitement to heretofore innocent memories. In the last fantasy that closes this chapter, Joyce writes, “I think that what makes all my sexual activity so enjoyable to me is that my parents were so strict with me when I was growing up.” Behind the silence with which she faces the world, the child begins to play over and over again with her taboo ideas, elaborating, adding elements that heighten their erotic charge, changing details with infinite care to ever-increase the orgasmic effect. In our outlawed memories, our first fantasies begin.

Like Joyce, Dorothy too begins her letter by discussing her “strict upbringing.” She can remember lying in bed as a child and thinking about her fantasies. “I was never able to banish these deliciously nasty thoughts from my mind,” she writes. What heightened her pleasure in these erotic scenarios was to imagine them while she could hear her mother moving around in another part of the house. Right under her mother’s nose, so to speak, she could play with these forbidden thoughts. In the secrecy of her mind, she could be sexually defiant.

Carla’s letter is not so much the work of an imagination like Dorothy’s as it is a collection of resummoned actualities. This loving evocation of the past can be defined as sexual fantasy too: it is the substitution of a remembered scene for present reality. “I like to go over my memories when I have nothing else to do,” writes Carla. “It gives me a warm feeling to remember all the people in my life, because I liked so many of them.”

I have found that this kind of fantasy, which sticks very close to actual events of the past, is almost always the mark of someone with low levels of sexual anxiety and/or guilt. When memories carry too heavy a charge of psychic pain, the fantasizer usually drops or disguises them, putting an emotional distance between herself and the ideas that excite her. She makes up imaginary events, uses imaginary people to express her eroticism; she can almost be said to see herself in the third person in her fantasy scenes – all this incredible sex is not happening to *me*, it is happening to *her*.

I hasten to add here that this does not mean that imaginary fantasies are the work of puritanic or guilt-ridden minds. I would say instead that they are the work of creative minds that need strategies other than memory over a distance of time to overcome inhibitions. Dorothy’s fantasies may be more the works of imagination than Carla’s, but

nobody reading Dorothy's six scenarios could feel they were invented by an inhibited woman.

What is most interesting about Carla's letter to me is that while her memories of past (and present) sexual experiences would shock or horrify most people, Carla herself speaks of them all very fondly, with total acceptance of every man, every sexual encounter – with less guilt about breaking even the incest barrier than most women would feel about kissing a stranger at a party. She speaks of her memories with no bravado, no shouts of defiance that might make us feel she was protesting too much. 'This is how I am,' her letter seems to say, "this is what I do, neither more nor less." It is her life of which she always speaks, and it does not occur to her for one second that she does not have every right in the world to do with it what she will.

DOROTHY

I have just finished reading your book, *My Secret Garden*, and I can truly state that it has changed my life for the better. It took my husband and I four evenings to read it, and those four nights produced the most fantastic sex of our entire married life. I had no idea that knowing about other women's sexual fantasies would turn him on so, and now I think I have the courage to describe some of my own to him, which I've never done before. You see, I had a very strict upbringing. Actually, I suppose it was no more strict than most women's, certainly no worse than that of the other girls I grew up with. But looking back now, I can see it's a miracle that I grew up with any feelings of sexuality whatsoever, given the fact that the atmosphere around our home was that sex just wasn't nice.

Let me say that I'm twenty-six, have been married for a year to a wonderful man I lived with for a year before we

married, have no children, and I have a good job as an executive secretary. My husband and I are middle class, both with college educations.

I know now that I have always engaged in sexual fantasy, but up until this point, I felt very guilty and ashamed of my fantasies, and even tried very hard to keep from having them. I can remember how guilty I felt as a little girl when I went to church with my parents, and knew what a terrible little sinner I was for having had those wicked thoughts during the week. I used to pray for salvation (although no one in my family was terribly religious . . . it's just that I was terribly sexual, I suppose). However, I was never able to banish these deliciously nasty thoughts from my mind; lying in bed as a child and thinking about them, even as I heard my mother moving about the house, made them all the more thrilling. Many of my fantasies stem from these early childhood daydreams, and have never lost their impact. Now, your delightful book has finally enabled me to relax with a guilt-free conscience and enjoy them.

As I have jotted down the basic themes before starting this letter, I see that I have at least six basic fantasies – each one involves a different position, and I adapt the appropriate fantasy to coincide with the particular position I'm actually in in bed. Below are a couple of my favorites:

1. (I use this one while being manipulated by hand before intercourse.) It's in the 1800s, and I am a beautiful, homeless, penniless young maiden on a voyage by ship to America. The ship's captain (handsome, rugged, much older) has agreed to take me, even though I have no money for my passage. After we are underway, though, I soon realize that there *will* be a payment demanded of me, and I am helpless to resist. (Do I want to be thrown overboard in the middle of the Atlantic?) I am the only woman aboard a ship of rugged, lusty, men, and they all stare at me with desire and longing for my exquisite body. The captain, however, saves me for himself. Since he knows I am a virgin