

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



# Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons

Lorna Landvik

# ANGRY HOUSEWIVES EATING BON BONS

Lorna Landvik



**BANTAM BOOKS**

LONDON • NEW YORK • TORONTO • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

# Contents

[Cover Page](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also By Author](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Part One: 1968-1970](#)

[The Members](#)

[June 1968](#)

[July 1968](#)

[August 1968](#)

[September 1968](#)

[October 1968](#)

[November 1968](#)

[December 1968](#)

[April 1969](#)

[November 1969](#)

[Part Two: The Seventies](#)

[May 1970](#)

[June 1970](#)

[October 1973](#)

[March 1974](#)

[July 1975](#)

[September 1976](#)

[August 1977](#)

[October 1977](#)

[November 1977](#)

[December 1977](#)

### [Part Three: The Eighties](#)

[January 1980](#)

[February 1980](#)

[December 1982](#)

[September 1983](#)

[April 1984](#)

[June 1986](#)

[August 1986](#)

[December 1986](#)

[January 1987](#)

[February 1987](#)

### [Part Four: The Nineties](#)

[June 1991](#)

[November 1993](#)

[May 1995](#)

[August 1995](#)

[January 1996](#)

[October 1996](#)

[May 1997](#)

[August 1997](#)

[January 1998](#)

## Epilogue

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.

Version 1.0

Epub ISBN 9781407095226

[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

**ANGRY HOUSEWIVES EATING BON BONS**  
**A BANTAM BOOK : 0 553 81641 1**

First publication in Great Britain

PRINTING HISTORY

Bantam edition published 2004

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Lorna Landvik 2003

The right of Lorna Landvik to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

*Condition of Sale*

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

Set in 11/13pt Bembo by Kestrel Data, Exeter, Devon.

Bantam Books are published by Transworld Publishers,  
61-63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA,  
a division of The Random House Group Ltd,  
in Australia by Random House Australia (Pty) Ltd,  
20 Alfred Street, Milsons Point, Sydney, NSW 2061,  
Australia,  
in New Zealand by Random House New Zealand Ltd,

18 Poland Road, Glenfield, Auckland 10, New Zealand  
and in South Africa by Random House (Pty) Ltd,  
Endulini, 5a Jubilee Road, Parktown 2193, South Africa.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Cox & Wyman Ltd,  
Reading, Berkshire.

Papers used by Transworld Publishers are natural,  
recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable  
forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the  
environmental regulations of the country of origin.



To Lori Naslund  
and  
Betty Lou Henson Long

For years of deep friendship and big laughs

Lorna Landvik is the bestselling author of *Patty Jane's House of Curl*, *Your Oasis on Flame Lake*, *The Tall Pine Polka* and *Welcome to the Great Mysterious*. She is also an actor, playwright and proud member of her own book club.

[www.booksattransworld.co.uk](http://www.booksattransworld.co.uk)

*Also by Lorna Landvik*

WELCOME TO THE GREAT MYSTERIOUS  
THE TALL PINE POLKA  
YOUR OASIS ON FLAME LAKE  
PATTY JANE'S HOUSE OF CURL

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A big thanks to the many book clubs who've invited me to their meetings and shared their food, libations and conversation - what fun women you are! Thanks to my own book club and its members: Susan, Camille, Julie, Gloria, Isla, Lizabeth, Joyce, Terri and Amy - long may we read, converse, laugh, wine, and dine.

And speaking of sisterhood (I was, you know), I'd like to reach back to my childhood to thank the mighty Mellstrom sisters - Joyce, Carla, Marilyn and Debbie - who taught me about the power of women early on, and the Eggerts - Judy, Candy and Becky - whose Toni perms I coveted and whose Friday night breaded-shrimp dinners were exotic to a Lutheran girl. Thanks to Darcy Allison for all those hours we spent drawing and writing stories. Also thanks to my mother, Ollie, and her band of sisters - Gola, Amy, Vellie, and Orpha - and to the memory of Gladys, Viola, and Beata - wonderful aunts all.

Thanks to Wendy Smith, Kim Hoffer, and Judy Heneghan (when are you going to move back here?) for being such good and fun friends. Thanks also to Mike Sobota for your visits, to Melissa Denton and Dana Farner for that incredible church service, and to Mary Jo Pehl for letting me crash at your apartment, man.

Thanks to Tom Winner, Mark and Kathy Strandjord, and Dick Farrell for your help in getting us set up in a house with an office.

A deep and grateful thank-you to Leona Nevler and Betsy Nolan - the editor and agent who held my hand from

the beginning - and an equally deep and grateful thanks to Maureen O'Neal and Suzanne Gluck, those responsible for holding my hand now.

And to my dazzling daughters, Harleigh and Kinga, and my wunnerful, wunnerful husband Chuck - for everything, thank you.

## PROLOGUE

September 1998

### FAITH

I knew all about having my life saved. When I was three years old, I broke free of my MawMaw's callused grasp to chase a paper cup skittering across the street at the same time a jalopy full of new army recruits careened around the corner. A sailor coming out of Knapp's Drugs and Sundries, with reflexes I hope served him well in his tour of duty, threw his bottle of Hires root beer to the sidewalk and raced out into the street, scooping me up in his arms. I can still hear the cacophony of squealing brakes, honking horns, and my grandmother's scream, feel the sailor's rough cotton uniform on my cheek and smell the soda pop on his breath. Thereafter, root beer would replace Nehi as my favorite soda, and of course I would forever believe the navy superior to the army because that's what the sailor said, in so many (profane) words, once he found out what field of service the scared young men in the rusty Nash had joined that morning.

When I was eleven, DellaRose Pryne and I had taken a walk along a country road to smoke the Viceroy I'd swiped from MawMaw's pack. When the wind began whipping up and the sky turned green, it seemed a great adventure, until DellaRose spotted the moving black smudge beyond the line of telephone poles and screamed, "Tornado!"

We jumped into a ditch and lay there, arms entwined around each other, as the locomotive of wind roared over us. Even in my terror, I couldn't resist looking up to see the tornado throwing up parts of the earth - and the Dobbsses' chicken coop - all around us.

And then there was the time when I was sixteen and drank too much on Student Skip Day and had to be fished out of the Tallahala River after bashing my head against a rock. I woke up to find myself being given mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by Billy Lawler, whose resemblance to James Dean had not gone unnoticed by every girl in the tri-county area. But this was not the way I had fantasized about kissing him, his anxious face mottled with the blood that streamed from my hairline, and I turned my pounding head to vomit in the scrubby grass, embarrassed and ashamed.

I didn't become a teetotaler that day (I hope that I never have to join *that* club), but I did revise my standards as to what social drinking was, and never again drank to the point of passing out. My life may have been saved by that adjustment; certainly excessive drinking had led to my mother's death, and if anything, I did not want a death like my mother's, let alone a life.

I took a sip of the brown swill the hospital claimed was coffee and regarded the four women in the room.

*But it's you, I thought. You who've saved my life more times than I can count. Who forced me to tell the secrets that were eating me up, and still loved me.*

As if hearing my thoughts, Audrey looked up from her knitting, adjusted her reading glasses, and winked.

She was completely silver-haired now, and at least fifty pounds heavier than when I had first thrown a snowball at her, but there was an easy elegance to her that neither age nor weight could diminish. In the days of miniskirts, Audrey could be counted on to wear the tiniest, as well as

necklines that plunged inches past propriety, but to me, she always looked . . . well, regal. Audrey had laughed when I told her this, had even slapped her thigh and claimed it was nothing but ‘posture, Faith . . . and an attitude. Good posture and an attitude let you get away with anything.’

Audrey, who introduced herself these days as ‘a former atheist whose wake-up call just happened to have God on the other end,’ was the type of person who got away with a lot simply because she refused to ask permission for the privilege of being herself. It was certainly not an attitude I came by easily.

‘You’ve got to start living up to your name,’ Audrey had told me long ago. ‘Have a little faith in Faith.’

It was as if she had asked me to break the sound barrier on foot.

‘How’m I supposed to do *that?*’

‘For starters, stop trying so hard to be perfect. No one’s perfect – except maybe Donna Reed, and she doesn’t count, because she’s only perfect on TV.’

I smiled at the memory of that conversation and of those gentle television sitcoms. We mocked the beautiful mothers in shirtwaist dresses as they poured milk from glass bottles and dispensed wisdom in their showplace kitchens (in high heels, of course), but at least their kids acted their age. Not like today, when the laugh track is cranked up high in response to every sexual innuendo lisped by some wide-eyed moppet. Don’t get me wrong, sexual innuendoes have their place – but not in conversation with a second grader. I guess I’m getting old, longing for those days when kids on TV called their dads ‘sir’ and *Shindig* was considered racy.

‘Why are you looking at me like that?’ asked the woman who still held the honor of being the loveliest woman – including Donna Reed – I had ever seen.



'I was just trying to remember if you ever wore miniskirts.'

'Good Lord,' said Merit, closing her book. 'I hope so.'

'Miniskirts,' said Audrey with a long sigh. 'How I loved my miniskirts. And hot pants. Remember those white vinyl hot pants I used to wear?'

Nodding, I tossed my Styrofoam cup into the wastebasket. 'I'm sure every man in Freesia Court remembers those hot pants.'

Merit frowned, her slight fingers probing the dimple in her chin. 'You know, come to think of it, I don't think I ever did. I don't think I was *allowed*. To wear a miniskirt, that is.'

Another memory made goose bumps rise on my arms.

'Maybe Kari can sew you up one,' whispered Slip, nodding at the dozing woman.

'How about it?' I asked as she opened her eyes. Everyone took turns snoozing during this vigil and had a knack for waking up whenever the conversation called for it. I was the only one who wouldn't sleep. I was used to staying alert; to be awake was to be armed, and if the Grim Reaper even *thought* about making an appearance, he was in for a fight from me. 'How about you make us group miniskirts, Kari?'

'I imagine it would take a lot more fabric than it did in the old days,' she said, 'but sure, I'll get right on it.'

Kari was the oldest of the group by a dozen years, but as far as looks went, she had been blessed with an aging clock that was set slower than the rest of ours. We all got older and Kari stayed the same.

'No, I think my miniskirt days are over,' said Merit.

'Never surrender,' said Audrey, pointing a knitting needle in Merit's direction. 'In fact, I vote that we all wear

miniskirts to the next AHEB meeting.'

The laughter that greeted her nomination was short-lived, as reality reminded us that the next AHEB meeting was in question. The room fell back into a silence muted by the clicking of knitting needles and the rustle of turning pages.

I studied one of the photographs I was considering using for our scrapbook. It was a picture of Kari holding a tray of cookies at one of her annual Christmas parties.

'How are we supposed to stand things?' I had once asked her at the peak of one of the many crises that conspire against anyone with the temerity to be alive and breathing.

A glaze came over Kari's blue eyes, the glaze of a person ready to tell a story.

'Once my mother and I were having lunch in this fancy hotel in Fargo and the waiter served us walleye that was undercooked - honestly, it was sushi before the days of sushi. We had him take our plates back to the kitchen but when he brought them back, the fish was now not only undercooked, but cold. He left us to attend to his other customers, completely ignoring us as we called, "Waiter!" He had absolutely no time for us or our complaints.'

Kari's got a wonderful laugh - as deep as Santa Claus with a cold. Looking at my face, she let it rip.

'My point is, sometimes life's like a bad waiter and serves you exactly what you *don't* want. You can cry and scream and order him to take it back, but in the end, you're the one who has to deal with what's finally set before you.'

All of us women in the room have had our share of surly waiters serving bad entrees, but for over thirty years, we have helped one another up from the table, passed long antacids and after-dinner mints, offered shoulders to cry on, stiff drinks, and desserts whose butter content was

exceeded only by its sugar load. But this . . . this *cancer* thing - could we survive something that seemed so grimly devoted to taking one of us away?

'I remember *you* had a miniskirt,' I said to Slip. 'We bought it together in the kids' department of Dayton's. You told me your dream was to buy adult clothes you didn't have to alter.'

I doubt she was the five feet she claimed to be, but still, Slip was the one you called when you needed help moving something heavy, the star acrobat in the neighborhood circus, the one who daily used the chin-up bar lodged in her son's bedroom doorway. Slip had hard, defined muscles before it was fashionable; she ran back in the days when people thought you were either crazy or being chased, and became a vegetarian when the rest of us were sawing into porterhouse steaks and thought a pitcher of strawberry daiquiris satisfied our daily fruit requirement.

Audrey pushed back her reading glasses and shoved her knitting paraphernalia into the wicker bag at her side.

'I've always envied your body,' she said, touching Slip with her manicured, ring-studded hand.

'Yeah, right,' said Slip. 'You who could fill out Marilyn Monroe's *and* Jayne Mansfield's clothes?'

'Jayne Mansfield,' said Merit. 'I haven't thought of her in years. Poor thing - I heard she had a really high IQ.'

'Slip has such a boy's body,' Audrey said, uninterested in debating Jayne Mansfield's Mensa eligibility. 'So little and flat-chested and hipless. I've always thought it must be so freeing to have a body like that.'

'I'd give anything for your breasts,' Slip said. 'Just for a day - one day on a nude beach.'

'But you'd tip over,' said Merit, and the idea of Audrey's mammoth breasts on Slip's tiny little body made us all laugh.

A male nurse with a wispy blond mustache and ponytail came in and began his business of checking vital signs and IV drips.

'You ladies sure like to laugh,' he said. 'I've never heard so much laughter coming out of a hospital room.'

'Really?' said Audrey. 'You should have heard us when we visited this one in the slammer.' She nodded in Kari's direction. It was an old joke of Audrey's to introduce Kari to strangers as an ex-con.

'Slammer.' The nurse nodded. 'That's funny. It's nice to hear sisters get along so well.'

'We're not sisters,' I said.

'Really?' said the nurse. '

Nope, just friends,' said Merit.

'Really?' said the nurse again. 'Because - wow - you sure look alike.'

'I'll take that as a compliment,' said Kari, smiling.

'I won't,' said Audrey, who then looked imperiously, as only Audrey could, at the nurse. 'It's just that you're young and male and blinded by a culture that says the only females worthy of attention are eighteen-year-old nubile pinups.' She paused to take a breath. 'So naturally, you think every woman over the age of fifty looks alike.'

'No . . . I . . . my mother . . . it's . . .'

stammered the nurse, whose blush was the color of boiled shrimp. His brow furrowed and he looked at the chart like an actor staring at a script whose lines he doesn't know. 'Uh, Dr Sobota will be here in about a half hour if you have any questions.' He hustled out of the room, holding his ponytail as if he feared we'd pull it.

'Holy diatribe,' said Slip, trying not to smile. 'The poor guy makes a little observation and he gets treated to one of your *rants*.'

'Aw, I was just having some fun,' said Audrey, picking up her knitting again. She giggled. 'I guess this *is* sort of a sisterly scene. Right out of *Little Women*.'

'I'm Jo,' I said, putting my dibs in first.

'I want to be Jo,' said Kari.

'You're Meg,' said Audrey. 'And Merit's Beth.'

'But Beth dies,' said Merit. 'I don't want to be Beth.'

Audrey shook her head. 'You're the sweet one. Beth was the sweet one. Therefore you're Beth. And Slip, you can be Marmee.'

'If I'm Marmee,' said Slip, 'then that makes you Amy. Spoiled, blond, selfish . . .'

Audrey returned Slip's smile with one of her own. 'So I'm not blond.'

'I don't want to be Beth,' said Merit softly.

We bickered a few minutes over who was most like what character - hardly the only time we'd argued about a book - and then Slip asked if anyone had a quarter.

'I think we should flip for Jo,' she said, giving me her famous I'm-right-and-you're-wrong look.

'Let's call in the nurse,' I said. 'We can ask him who'd make a better Jo.'

'As if he'd know,' said Audrey. 'He doesn't strike me as a man conversant with *Little Women*.'

'Yeah,' said Slip. 'He looks like a man conversant with where to score the best dope.'

Merit nodded. 'He reminds me of those Deadhead friends of Melody's.'

'Get you!' said Audrey.

'What?'

'Well, that you even know what a Deadhead is! You've come a long way, sister.'

'Remember when we threatened to burn her Mitch Miller and Mantovani records?' I asked.

'Someone had to drag her into the swingin' sixties,' said Slip.

'You guys dragged me into a lot more than that,' said Merit, and we all sat for a moment, reflecting on how true the statement was for all of us.

'Hey,' said Audrey finally, 'while we're waiting for Dr What's-His-Face to give us the latest verdict, refresh my memory: what's this month's book?'

'*To Kill a Mockingbird*,' I said. 'My choice for our greatest-hits year.'

'I love rereading all our favorites,' said Kari. 'I can't wait to dive into Jane Austen again.'

Slip looked at Audrey. 'You're not planning to do *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* again, are you?'

'That,' said Audrey with a smile, 'is one subject I can honestly say I know enough about.' She looked at the clock next to the TV mounted on the wall. 'Say, wasn't Grant going to stop by?'

'He'd better,' said Slip. 'He said he was bringing chocolate.' She yawned into her closed fist. 'Hey, while we're waiting, how about a song? A nice cowboy song?'

It was Slip's little entertainment lately - she thought it cheered everyone up - to request group sing-alongs.

'Let's sing something a bunch of cowboys would sing around the campfire. And if any of you wants to throw in a yodel or two, feel free.'

'"Home on the Range"?' asked Merit, and after we shrugged our consent, she hummed a note we all tried to match.

Even though Merit sang for a living now, her voice was always a little too trembly soprano for my tastes; I preferred Kari's clear and strong alto. Slip could carry a tune, but not very far, and Audrey was more a brayer than a singer. I was the Rex Harrison talk-your-way-through type of vocalist, but still, we all sang 'Home on the Range' gamely, happily, even joyfully.

Grant tiptoed in and started singing with us, and I wished that there really was a place in the world where discouraging words were seldom heard and the skies were not cloudy all day.

'Faith, are you all right?' Grant asked.

Shaking my head, I brushed away a tear with my finger. 'Are any of us?'

'No, but at least we're all here together,' said Audrey. 'And that's something.'

Nodding, I whispered, 'I guess,' and even in my grief, I didn't have to guess: we *were* all together and that *was* something.

A few years back, when I finally got smart enough to go to a therapist, she asked me how I had held things together all these years.

It didn't take long to come up with an answer. 'That's easy. I belong to a book club.'

PART ONE

1968-1970



## THE MEMBERS

A Fuller Brush salesman had the unfortunate task of trying to sell his wares to the women of Freesia Court during the fifth day of a March cold snap.

'They were like caged animals,' he complained later to his district manager. 'I felt like any minute they were going to turn on me.'

'Brushes?' Faith Owens had said when he offered up his bright smile and sales pitch on her icy front doorstep. 'I'm sorry, but I've got a little more than brushes to worry about right now. Like wondering if spring is ever going to get here. Because I truly believed it might really be coming when *boom* - here it is, twenty below zero with a windchill factor that would bring Nanook of the North to his knees.'

'Thank you for your time,' said the salesman, picking up his case. 'You have a pleasant day, now.'

'And what exactly is a windchill factor anyway?'

'Faith,' called her husband, Wade, from the living room. 'Faith, don't be rude, honey.'

'Well what is it?' she asked, slamming the door with her hip. 'What exactly *is* a windchill factor?'

'This is Minnesota,' said Wade, ignoring her question because he wasn't quite sure of the answer. 'What do you expect?'

'Oh, I don't know - *maybe a little damn relief?*'

'Might I remind you,' said Wade, 'how you cried with delight seeing your first snowfall?'

'I cried with delight the first time I had sex with you, but that doesn't mean I want it nonstop.'

'You're telling me,' said Wade with a wistful sigh.

'Ha, ha, ha,' said Faith, surveying her neat and trim husband as he brushed his crew cut with his palm, a gesture he always made after what he thought was a joke.

It was no surprise to Faith that her husband had less trouble adapting to the frozen north. Hell, he was flying out of it all the time. Right before Christmas, Wade had been transferred to Minneapolis from Dallas, although to Faith, it may as well have been Siberia.

That very morning he was leaving for a three-day trip with a layover in warm and sunny Los Angeles, and as she stomped upstairs to finish his packing, anger seethed through Faith like steam through their loud and clanking radiators - *Los Angeles!* In just a few hours Wade could feasibly be lying poolside as some flirtatious Nordic stewardess (why did every Minnesota stewardess she'd seen have to look like Miss Sweden?) rubbed suntan lotion on his shoulders, while she, Faith, rubbed ointment onto the chapped little bottom of their son, Beau.

She pitched a rolled-up ball of socks into Wade's suitcase with the velocity of a teenage show-off trying to knock down a pyramid of bottles at a carnival booth. There had been a time when she actually *enjoyed* packing for her husband - when she'd fold his shirts into neat rectangles, slipping a sheet of tissue paper between them so they wouldn't wrinkle; when she'd tuck a love note inside a pair of boxer shorts or dab her perfume on the neckline of an undershirt - but routine had long ago tarnished *that* thrill.

Now Faith had an urge to pack a different sort of surprise - perhaps a used diaper from the bathroom pail that reeked of ammonia, or maybe a sprinkling of itching powder.

She smiled then, remembering one of her more innocent teenage pranks. She and Melinda Carmody had ordered itching powder from the back pages of *True Confessions* magazine and, sneaking into the classroom during lunch hour, sprinkled it on their algebra teacher's cardigan sweater, draped over the back of his chair. When tyrannical Mr Melscher (who rewarded wrong answers with a sarcastic 'Think again, *Einstein*') put the sweater on, Faith and Melinda held their breaths in anticipation. Although the man's shirt seemed to have blocked much of the powder's itching powers, he did tug at his collar and squirm a bit, giving the girls far more entertainment than they had trying to figure out if  $x$  equaled  $y$ .

Closing the suitcase, Faith sighed, realizing how far removed she was from things like best friends and practical jokes and giggle fits.

*How far away I am from everything fun*, she thought - from rides in convertibles with boys who drove with one hand on the wheel and the other one on her; from parties where couples necked on the porches of fraternity houses; from gently turning down, on the same night, two boys who wanted her to wear their pins.

*Who are you kidding?* Faith thought, sitting heavily on the bed. *You're starting to believe your own press.* It astounded her sometimes, the ease with which she assimilated into her present life: how she could get huffy about a visit from a Fuller Brush man or about packing her husband's suitcase as if she were some *normal* housewife. As if she weren't Primrose Reynolds' daughter.

She shuddered. It was as if her memories had a geography all their own. In the most recent ones she was on safe and firm ground and was the Faith she wanted and tried hard to be; further back she was the neglected little girl who seemed to be ground zero for lice infestations, the wild teenager who could just as easily have gone to prison

as to college. In these memories, she struggled through swamps and quicksand.

Faith's life had been one of constant upheaval, and if she had learned anything, it was not only how to adapt to it but how to go beyond it. But maybe it was to be the great irony of her life that while she survived years of chaos, a few months as a lonely housewife in the frostbitten north had the power to finally do her in.

'Stupid godforsaken frozen tundra,' she muttered, refusing to trespass in the dangerous territory of her past. As she dragged Wade's suitcase off the bed, she looked out the window laced with frost to see the Fuller Brush man take a tumble on the slippery walkway of her neighbor's house.

Across the street from the Owens residence, in the big colonial that in Faith's estimation needed a little TLC, Audrey Forrest lay in rumpled sheets, staring at the ceiling. Her five-year-old was bullying her three-year-old, but it was her belief that children settled their differences faster when adults didn't intervene. Besides, she didn't want to get out of bed.

She stretched her arms to the ceiling, admiring the delicacy of her fingers and wrists. At the moment she was on a diet that called for entirely too many grapefruits and boiled eggs, and until she saw progress on a scale, she would admire those few things, such as her wrists and fingers, that were in no need of size reduction.

Thinking about her stupid diet, her good, lazy-cat mood faded - why was Paul so adamant that she lose twenty pounds anyway?

'It'll help you feel better about yourself,' her husband had said the other day, handing her the diet paperback he'd bought on his lunch break downtown.

'I feel *fine* about myself,' said Audrey, piling her thick dark hair on top of her head and posing like a pinup model. She liked her curvy body, ample seat, and full breasts. 'And fine about my body.' She leaned over, wrapping her arms around Paul's neck. '*You* usually feel fine about my body.' She pressed herself to him, nibbling his earlobe, but what normally drove him crazy now seemed to alarm him, for he pushed her aside as if she were transmitting a germ he did not want to catch.

'Paul,' she said, unable to believe he didn't want to ravish her right there on the kitchen floor, 'what do you expect? I'm Italian.' In truth, she was mostly Dutch and German, but she felt far more affinity toward the Italian grandfather who spiced up her genetic mix.

'No,' said her husband, looking at her with the glasses he thought made him look like a more experienced attorney than he was. 'Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren are Italian.' He pulled the sports section out of the paper and snapped it open. 'You're just fat.'

'*Paul,*' said Audrey, her voice wounded.

'Oh, baby, I was just making a little joke.'

'Well, it wasn't funny.'

'I know. I'm sorry. I *do* think you're beautiful, Aude. It's just that, geez' - he swatted the newspaper he was reading - 'every one of these models in here looks like that damned Sticky.'

Audrey had to laugh. 'Twiggy, honey. Her name's Twiggy.'

'Well, compared to her, Miss America - which *you* could be, babe - looks hefty.'

He certainly hadn't been thinking of where her weight fell in the current fashion curve that morning, when he'd pulled her to him, pushing up the fabric of her nightgown until it was a lacy roll around her waist. Audrey had been in

the middle of a dream about her grandfather's backyard garden, the place of some of her happiest childhood memories, but she was always welcoming of Paul's advances and kissed him hungrily. After he climaxed, he jumped out of bed, his arms held up to the ceiling, and said, 'Thank you, God, for letting me marry a sex maniac!'

'There are worse things to be a maniac about, wouldn't you say, big boy?'

Paul didn't turn around to acknowledge her little Mae West impersonation, but skipped off to the bathroom to shower.

'That's mine! Give it back!'

A crash accompanied her three-year-old's plea, and then there was a moment of silence before both her children began screaming. Wrapping her robe around her, Audrey got out of bed, ready to seize the day - or the scruff of her children's necks.

A Sunday-school teacher had once told Merit Iverson that God had held her face in his hands and sculpted it himself. It was true, she had the face of an angel, and had anyone been observing her that morning, it would appear also true that she had the smoking habit of a pool hall hustler. She lit her third cigarette of the hour, dragging on it as if it were oxygen and she were tubercular. If moving to Minneapolis from Iowa had been the first subversive act of her life, smoking was the second. Her father, a Lutheran minister (from whom she hid her habit), thought smoking - at least for women - a vice as well as a mark of low moral character. But waiting for her bus one day, Merit saw a billboard of a woman lighting up, a sophisticated, elegant woman who looked as if she had the world on a string, something Merit decidedly did not. She bought a pack of Kools that day.