

LAKE HUDSON'S DAUGHTER*

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At least these two aren't always telling me how proud I should be of my mother; how brave she is; what a hero and inspiration and blah-blah-blah she is. These two are a little weird at times, but so were all the other women I've lived with in the past few years. The two Faiths in Indianapolis were probably the weirdest. It was really creepy the way each one kept repeating the other's name, which was, of course, her own name. I mean, Faith isn't all that common a name, and Indianapolis isn't all that small a town. I'd think they could each have found someone else.

The Faiths were creepiest at night. I'd be trying to sleep out in what was supposed to be a living room on some cushion they called a futon, but wasn't, and I could hear them in their bedroom. The first night I was there, I thought the cops were below their window. I was more naive then, and actually thought the FBI was tracking me. I could hear the Faiths yelling *police, police*. I didn't sleep all night, waiting for white men in blue suits to break down the door. I didn't relax until I heard the birds in the morning. My mother always got nervous at the first chirp of morning, but I like all noises that aren't made by people.

The next night I figured out they were yelling *please*. But the creepiest part was listening to each one crying and moaning and calling out her own name. I wondered if it was like making love to yourself.

In the morning, they'd act so polite, as if they had never touched each other. Maybe that was the weirdest part of all. I guess it was for my benefit, but I'm not a kid or anything. And I know all about lesbians. My mother's one, which is why I've been living in so many places lately.

One of the Faiths said I was privileged to not only be the daughter of a famous and fearless lesbian, but to have the op-

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portunity to meet wonderful women across the country. I guess she thought that she and the other Faith were actually wonderful.

"It's like having lives in a lifetime," one Faith said.

"You're so lucky," the other Faith said.

"You're both stupid," I said.

I left not long after that. The Faiths said it was getting too hot, but I know they just got tired of me. I wondered where I would wake up next.

I've lived so many places and had so many different names, that it takes me at least an hour to wake up in the morning, even after I hear the birds. Most people wake up and think, what day is it? That way, if it's a school day or a work day, they can get depressed right away. I wake up and think, whose house am I in? What's my name supposed to be?

My mother's name never changes. She's Lake Hudson, as if she were a place and not a person. Visit the famous Lesbian Lawyer Lake! Only the lake is surrounded by bars: my mother is in jail in California, and I'm not allowed to visit her. Instead, I'm here in North Florida—or is it North Dakota?—with two lesbian lawyers, who are not famous and not named Lake.

Their names are Opal and Sonya. They call me Hadley, which is my real name. Most people just decide they will call me something else, although when I was with the witches in Wisconsin I got to pick out my own name. There was a ceremony and everything. I picked out Owl Wing. Everyone thought that was great. When I told them that my mother was petrified of owls, having once been swooped down on by one when she was a child, the witches called on the four winds to heal my mother of her fear. I started wondering whether she might not actually miss birds, being in prison and all. Anyway, I did get to wear feathers a lot.

My real name is Hadley Hudson. Hadley was the street where my father grew up: his family was known as the Hudsons of Hadley Street. Why my mother let me be named after a street sign, I'll never know, although that was before she was either a lesbian or a lawyer. She wasn't famous then either, except that she was married to a Hudson, my father, who everyone, except his mother, calls Hudson. I guess my mother liked him or his name or something enough to move away with him and change her own last name, of which she had already had several, courtesy of stepfathers. Grandmother Hudson once said my mother

was a bastard, and always said at least my mother's name wasn't *River*, but I never understood that until last year when I lived in New York with the lesbian theater troupe.

I guess my mother even liked him enough to have *me*, though she told me that she had thought long and hard about getting one of those newly legal abortions when she found out she was pregnant. She said she assumed I'd change her life. I have. I've made her famous.

My mother is a cause célèbre, at least that's what the articles say. I came across an old one in the bathroom. Opal and Sonya must have been reading up on the case before I got here. I sat on the toilet and read the article, probably for the fiftieth time. And for probably the fiftieth time I got mad. All those words about how *she* suffers, how *she* is noble and wonderful and full of integrity, how *she* is a victim of patriarchy and injustice and heterosexism. Not a single word about me. Not one word. It pisses the shit out of me.

I don't even feel guilty about getting angry any more. I was cured of guilt out at Featherstone Feminist Farm, more than a year ago, when I became the youngest member of the anarcho/lesbo/seperato collective. No one asked me whether I wanted to be a member of the collective, or even if I felt anarcho or lesbo, although I certainly felt separato. I even felt separato from Terry, who probably thought I had a crush on her because I followed her around so much. I just thought she was so sensible. Unlike most of the other women there, unlike my mother. Terry was a therapist, like most of the women there. Unlike my mother. My father, a psychiatrist, always said that therapists were the bastards of the field. My mother would nod in agreement, like she always did before she became a lesbian lawyer.

It was Terry who took me to town to telephone my father. I called him at his office after hours, and he answered the phone. He sounded less fierce than I remembered. I think my mother was always a little afraid of him. When I heard his voice, I hung up. I didn't have anything to say.

Terry and the other anarcho/lesbo/separatos taught me that guilt is silly. Every morning at the farm, before breakfast even, we each picked out our feeling for the day. It was important to name our feelings, Terry always said. There were two blackboards, one with *O.K.* and one with *Could Be Better*. Guilt was

definitely *Could Be Better*, along with fear and greed and envy. So every morning I picked out my feeling for that day—grumpy, which was on the *O.K.* blackboard. Terry always picked out peaceful which was also on the *O.K.* blackboard. I got very good at being grumpy, but I guess Terry was not so good at being peaceful. She left the farm to do relief work in Jordan.

I'm still pretty good at being grumpy, but grumpy is a lot like angry. It makes me feel stupid. Stupid and impatient. Impatient to be eighteen and free and an adult. I'm tired of being only a daughter.

Meanwhile, I'm here in wherever-I-am, living with whoever-they-are and their kid, Powell. When I first saw the kid, I thought I'd been enlisted as the free babysitter, but it hasn't been like that, at least so far. Powell is really not bad for a seven-year-old boy. It's been awhile since I've been around boys, so it's kind of fun. Especially since I never have to watch him, and I don't even have to share a room with him.

I haven't had my own room since I lived with both my parents. This room is not as nice, of course: it doesn't have wallpaper with a geometric design or sliding mirrored closet doors, but it is just as big. Best of all, I've got my own windows. They face west, into a pasture. Opal said we could buy curtains for my room if I wanted, but I don't want to. I like to come home from school and watch the sun set behind the cows, the cattle egrets sucking bugs from between hooves and never getting stepped on.

Sonya told me that cattle egrets aren't even natives. She said they've only been here from Africa since the fifties, though they've multiplied like crazy and now there are more of them than the regular egrets that have been around here forever. Sonya knows lots of neat things like that. Sometimes after school she'll be home, and she'll walk me out into that pasture. In the late winter afternoon, it feels as cold as North Dakota. I like wearing Opal's wool coat, even if it is plaid. Sonya lets me look close up at the furry-eared cows and snow-white birds.

It's strange being in school again. The third day I was here, Opal said I was going to school. I was certainly surprised. I mean, I'm a fugitive, and who ever heard of a fugitive going to junior high. Besides, I thought I could just stay at the house and read. I told Sonya that.

"Read what?" she said.

I thought this was a crazy question. These women had a whole roomful of books. The room didn't have any heat, but I guess that kept the books better.

"Anything," I answered.

Then I told her what I'd been reading. I told her that I'd read Mary Daly at the Faiths', Judy Grahn near the Hudson River, Audre Lorde at Featherstone, and Starhawk with the witches in Wisconsin. I didn't mention all the Naiad novels I'd read looking for the sex scenes, or *On Our Backs*.

"Forget it," Sonya said.

"But I don't need to go to school," I said.

"Need has nothing to do with it," Opal said. "Need it or not, you're going to school."

"Why?" I challenged. I saw Powell watching closely.

"It's the law, for one thing," Sonya said. She smiled slightly. I thought I saw a dimple, but it was gone very quickly.

"You want to keep your first name, right," Opal stated more than asked. "But you'll need a different last one so that we can say you are our sister. Pick a name—Rugerrio or Overstreet."

"Overstreet," I said. I kind of liked Rugerrio better, but I thought Overstreet was funnier. The Hudsons of Overstreet.

"Fine," Opal said, but I thought she sounded disappointed. I tried not to feel guilty. Even though I learned guilt was not O.K. at Featherstone, I also learned a lot about racism and classism and elitism. I didn't want to be insensitive about Opal's last name, which sounded foreign to me. I didn't want to be accused of being a privileged Anglo twit, like I was when I stayed with the lesbian theater troupe in New York. It was true, I was white and privileged. But then again, most of the women I'd been meeting seemed to be.

I apologized to Opal.

"Hadley," she said, "just relax."

Sonya said that I'd probably read too many issues of *off our backs*. I didn't tell her that I did read every issue, looking for mention of Lake Hudson, the place if not the person.

"I'll get the birth certificate and all tomorrow," Sonya said.

"Mine?" I was a bit surprised.

"No. Hadley Overstreet's. School records for this good student, a recent transfer from a large school district."

"Isn't that illegal?" I asked.

"Of course," they both said.

They sure are strange lawyers. Not just because they make me go to school because it's the law and then break the law to get me in, but other things, too. Like their office. It doesn't even have any carpeting. It's about a mile from this old farmhouse we live in, and still out in the middle of nowhere.

The way they dress is another thing: jeans, like they are going to take a hike out in the pasture. They don't wear stockings or suits unless one of them has to go to a hearing or trial. Then one of them practically has to dress the other one who is cursing up and down.

My mother always wore silk suits and sheer stockings to work on the fourteenth floor of the Kruger Building. She had an eel skin briefcase that Grandmother Hudson gave her when she graduated law school and a diamond watch that Hudson had given her for the same thing. I guess Hudson and his mother didn't know that being a lawyer would make my mother a lesbian.

My mother met Paige at the firm. Paige is my mother's lover, another lesbian lawyer, but more like my mother than like Opal or Sonya. Paige's father had been Hudson's attorney. Hudson wasn't too happy to find out about my mother and Paige. He started screaming about how divorce wouldn't be good enough for my mother, and about how at least Paige's father wasn't alive to see his daughter turned into a dyke. That was the first time I heard the word *dyke*, though it wasn't the last, and certainly not the last time I heard the word *divorce*.

It wasn't the first time I'd heard about divorce. In grade school, I'd sit up in my bed in the room with the geometric wallpaper, watching myself in the mirrored closet doors and listen to them argue. My father, the psychiatrist, would say my mother was low rent and had married him for his money. My mother, the law student, would say my father was a pig and married her for her body. One of them would mention divorce. The other would mention me. I'd start to worry about something I'd spilled at dinner. If I kept on being bad, no one would want me.

Then I'd hear ugly sounds coming from their bedroom, somewhere between laughs and cries. I'd hear my father call, *Jesus*, *Jesus*, as if that were my mother's name. Then it would get real quiet, so quiet I could hear the water running in my parents' bathroom.

At breakfast, they would smile and kiss each other, like nothing had happened. Even though I was a kid, I knew. I tried to be polite. But then I would spill something or say something stupid and I could feel them start to get mad at each other again.

When Powell spills something, no one yells. Though Sonya gets mad when Powell squishes spaghetti through his teeth.

"Stop it," she yells.

Opal laughs. "Didn't you do that when you were a kid, oh my perfect baby dyke?"

"That's different," Sonya says, trying to be grumpy. I could give her a few lessons.

"Are you trying to say we eat too much spaghetti? Are you maligning my ethnic heritage?"

"Fuck your heritage," Sonya says. "We do eat too much spaghetti. And too much broccoli."

The next Saturday we drive to Georgia.

"Do you like barbecue?" Opal says.

"I thought we were vegetarians," I say.

"We are," Opal says. "Very strict. And that's why we're going to Georgia."

"If it happens in Georgia, it doesn't count," Sonya explains.

The ribs are greasy and good. It's all-you-can-eat night. Powell and I split another plate. It's been a long time since I've eaten meat. I listen to Sonya and Opal talk about law stuff.

"I think there's got to be a responsive pleading," Opal says.

"Oh shit," Sonya says. "Does that mean we're screwed for attorney's fees again?"

"Afraid so."

"More ribs?" Sonya laughs.

I laugh too. I'd told Sonya and Opal about one dinner with the witches in Wisconsin. They were very strict vegetarians, no butter or anything. I couldn't imagine them ever eating barbecue, no matter where they were. It was pretty boring, too. They were always talking about unity and telepathy. So, one night Raven says to me, "Owl Wing, would you like some more tabouli?" And I say, "Raven, what kind of witch are you that you don't already know?" No one laughed then, but Sonya and Opal seem to think it's pretty funny.

"Those damned landlords will eventually win. Maybe we should put a hex on them," Sonya says, still sort of laughing.

"There should be a hex for attorney's fees."

"Or at least a damn statute."

"The law sure is fucked up." I say this, although I hadn't really meant to. I was just thinking it, and suddenly my mouth was moving.

Sonya nods. If I was at Featherstone Farm right now, someone would be asking me to express my feelings, but Sonya just keeps nodding. Then she says, "Sure is."

I'm a little embarrassed. I hate for people to feel sorry for me. So, the law is fucked up. Everyone knows that. But people use *me* to prove that it is; or at least use my famous lesbian lawyer mother, Lake, as an example. Lake Hudson is sitting in a jail in California as I eat ribs in Georgia because she won't tell the court where I am. I wonder if she even knows where I am any more. I wonder if I even want her to know where I am any more. I like living with Sonya and Opal and Powell. I even like school.

But if my mother tells the court where I am, she gets out of jail. It's the same court that told my mother that my father gets custody of me because she's a lesbian. I guess she doesn't like that court very much.

I guess I don't either.

Everybody is real quiet on the way back to Florida. Powell falls asleep in the back seat, leaning on me, but I don't mind all that much. When we get home, I go sit on my bed and look out the curtainless window. I can hear Powell yelling in the yard.

Opal runs into my room. "Come outside, quick!"

Our front yard is filled with birds, all screeching and flying this way and that and pecking at the ground. They swoop down at the cats, who run for cover under the house.

"What are they?" Opal asks Sonya.

"Blackbirds, it looks like. Or maybe grackles."

Whatever they are, there seem to be millions of them. I can't even see the ground.

"My mother is terrified of birds," I say. Then, as if the birds have heard me and been insulted, there's a terrible screaming as the whole flock starts flapping and rising. The east sky blackens with wings like a really bad bruise.

"That sounds sensible to me," Sonya says.

We all go inside.