

Erica Long

Fear of Flying

Chapter 1

There were 117 psychoanalysts on the Pan Am flight to Vienna and I'd been treated by at least six of them. And married a seventh. God knows it was a tribute either to the shrinks' ineptitude or my own glorious unanalyzability that I was now, if anything, more scared of flying than when I began my analytic adventures some thirteen years earlier.

My husband grabbed my hand therapeutically at the moment of takeoff.

"Christ—it's like ice," he said. He ought to know the symptoms by now since he's held my hand on lots of other flights. My fingers (and toes) turn to ice, my stomach leaps upward into my rib cage, the temperature in the tip of my nose drops to the same level as the temperature in my fingers, my nipples stand up and salute the inside of my bra (or in this case, dress—since I'm not wearing a bra), and for one screaming minute my heart and the engines correspond as we attempt to prove again that the laws of aerodynamics are not the flimsy superstitions which, in my heart of hearts, I know they are. Never mind the diabolical INFORMATION TO PASSENGERS, I happen to be convinced that only my own concentration (and that of my mother—who always seems to expect her children to die in a plane crash) keeps this bird aloft. I congratulate myself on every successful takeoff, but not too enthusiastically because it's also part of my personal religion that the minute you grow overconfident and really relax about the flight, the plane crashes instantly. Constant vigilance, that's my motto. A mood of cautious optimism should prevail. But actually my mood is better described as cautious pessimism. OK, I tell myself, we seem to be off the ground

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and into the clouds but the danger isn't past. This is, in fact, the most perilous patch of air. Right here over Jamaica Bay where the plane banks and turns and the "No Smoking" sign goes off. This may well be where we go screaming down in thousands of flaming pieces. So I keep concentrating very hard, helping the pilot (a reassuringly midwestern voice named Donnelly) fly the 250-passenger motherfucker. Thank God for his crew cut and middle-America diction. New Yorker that I am, I would never trust a pilot with a New York accent.

As soon as the seat-belt sign goes off and people begin moving about the cabin, I glance around nervously to see who's on board. There's a big-breasted mama-analyst named Rose Schwamm-Lipkin with whom I recently had a consultation about whether or not I should leave my current analyst (who isn't, mercifully, in evidence). There's Dr. Thomas Frommer, the harshly Teutonic expert on *Anorexia Nervosa*, who was my husband's first analyst. There's kindly, rotund Dr. Arthur Feet, Jr., who was the third (and last) analyst of my friend Pia. There's compulsive little Dr. Raymond Schriff who is hailing a blond stewardess (named "Nanci") as if she were a taxi. (I saw Dr. Schriff for one memorable year when I was fourteen and starving myself to death in penance for having finger-fucked on my parents' living-room couch. He kept insisting that the horse I was dreaming about was my father and that my periods would return if only I would "accept being a vohman.") There's smiling, bald Dr. Harvey Snucker whom I saw in consultation when my first husband decided he was Jesus Christ and began threatening to walk on the water in Central Park Lake. There's foppish, hand-tailed Dr. Ernest Klumpner, the supposedly "brilliant theoretician" whose latest book is a psychoanalytic study of John Knox. There's black-bearded Dr. Stanton Rappoport-Rosen who recently gained notoriety in New York analytic circles when he moved to Denver and branched out into something called "Cross-Country Group Ski-Therapy." There's Dr. Arnold Aaronson pretending to play chess on a magnetic board with his new wife (who was his patient until last year), the singer Judy Rose. Both of them are surreptitiously looking around to see who is looking at them—and for one moment, my eyes and Judy Rose's meet. Judy Rose became famous in the fifties for recording a series of satirical ballads about pseudointellectual life in New York. In a whiny and deliberately unmusical voice, she sang the saga of a Jewish girl who

takes courses at the New School, reads the Bible for its prose, discusses Martin Buber in bed, and falls in love with her analyst. She has now become one with the role she created.

Besides the analysts, their wives, the crew, and a few poor outnumbered laymen, there were some children of analysts who'd come along for the ride. Their sons were mostly sulky-faced adolescents in bell bottoms and shoulder-length hair who looked at their parents with a degree of cynicism and scorn which was almost palpable. I remembered myself traveling abroad with my parents as a teen-ager and always trying to pretend they weren't with me. I tried to lose them in the Louvre! To avoid them in the Uffizi! To moon alone over a Coke in a Paris café and pretend that those loud people at the next table were not—though clearly they were—my parents. (I was pretending, you see, to be a Lost Generation exile with my parents sitting three feet away.) And here I was back in my own past, or in a bad dream or a bad movie: *Analyst and Son of Analyst*. A planetload of shrinks and my adolescence all around me. Stranded in midair over the Atlantic with 117 analysts many of whom had heard my long, sad story and none of whom remembered it. An ideal beginning for the nightmare the trip was going to become.

We were bound for Vienna and the occasion was historic. Centuries ago, wars ago, in 1938, Freud fled his famous consulting room on the Berggasse when the Nazis threatened his family. During the years of the Third Reich any mention of his name was banned in Germany, and analysts were expelled (if they were lucky) or gassed (if they were not). Now, with great ceremony, Vienna was welcoming the analysts back. They were even opening a museum to Freud in his old consulting room. The mayor of Vienna was going to greet them and a reception was to be held in Vienna's pseudo-Gothic Rathaus. The enticements included free food, free Schnaps, cruises on the Danube, excursions to vineyards, singing, dancing, shenanigans, learned papers and speeches and a tax-deductible trip to Europe. Most of all, there was to be lots of good old Austrian *Gemütlichkeit*. The people who invented *schmaltz* (and crematoria) were going to show the analysts how welcome back they were.

Welcome back! Welcome back! At least those of you who survived Auschwitz, Belsen, the London Blitz and the co-optation of America. *Willkommen!* Austrians are nothing if not charming.

Holding the Congress in Vienna had been a hotly debated issue for years, and many of the analysts had come only reluctantly. Anti-Semitism was part of the problem, but there was also the possibility that radical students at the University of Vienna would decide to stage demonstrations. Psychoanalysis was out of favor with New Left members for being "too individualistic." It did nothing, they said, to further "the worldwide struggle toward communism."

I had been asked by a new magazine to observe all the fun and games of the Congress closely and to do a satirical article on it. I began my research by approaching Dr. Smucker near the galley, where he was being served coffee by one of the stewardesses. He looked at me with barely a glimmer of recognition.

"How do you feel about psychoanalysis returning to Vienna?" I asked in my most cheerful lady-interviewer voice. Dr. Smucker seemed taken aback by the shocking intimacy of the question. He looked at me long and searchingly.

"I'm writing an article for a new magazine called *Psyche*," I said. I figured he'd at least have to crack a smile at the name.

"Well then," Smucker said stolidly, "how do you feel about it?" And he waddled off toward his short bleached-blond wife in the blue knit dress with a tiny green alligator above her (blue) right breast.

I should have known. Why do analysts always answer a question with a question? And why should this night be different from any other night—despite the fact that we are flying in a 747 and eating unkosher food?

"The Jewish science," as anti-Semites call it. Turn every question upside down and shove it up the asker's ass. Analysts all seem to be Talmudists who flunked out of seminary in the first year. I was reminded of one of my grandfather's favorite gags:

Q: "Why does a Jew always answer a question with a question?"

A: "And why should a Jew not answer a question with a question?"

Ultimately though, it was the unimaginativeness of most analysts which got me down. OK, I'd been helped a lot by my first one—the German who was going to give a paper in Vienna—but he was a rare breed: witty, self-mocking, unpretentious. He had none of the flat-footed literal-mindedness which makes even the most brilliant psychoanalysts sound so

pompous. But the others I'd gone to—they were so astonishingly literal-minded. The horse you are dreaming about is your father. The kitchen stove you are dreaming about is a penis, in reality, your analyst. This is called the *transference*. No?

You dream about breaking your leg on the ski slope. You have, in fact, just broken your leg on the ski slope and you are lying on the couch wearing a ten-pound plaster cast which has had you housebound for weeks, but has also given you a beautiful new appreciation of your toes and the civil rights of paraplegics. But the broken leg in the dream represents your own "mutilated genital." You always wanted to have a penis and now you feel guilty that you have *deliberately* broken your leg so that you can have the pleasure of the cast, no?

No!

OK, let's put the "mutilated genital" question aside. It's a dead horse, anyway. And forget about your mother the oven and your analyst the pile of shit. What do we have left except the smell? I'm not talking about the first years of analysis when you're hard at work discovering your own craziness so that you can get some work done instead of devoting your *entire* life to your neurosis. I'm talking about when both you and your husband have been in analysis as long as you can remember and it's gotten to the point where no decision, no matter how small, can be made without both analysts having an imaginary caucus on a cloud above your head. You feel rather like the Trojan warriors in the *Iliad* with Zeus and Hera fighting above them. I'm talking about the time when your marriage has become a *menage à quatre*. You, him, your analyst, his analyst. Four in a bed. This picture is definitely rated X.

We had been in this state for at least the past year. Every decision was referred to the shrink, or the shrinking process. Should we move into a bigger apartment? "Better see what's going on first." (Bennett's euphemism for: back to the couch.) Should we have a baby? "Better work things through first." Should we join a new tennis club? "Better see what's going on first." Should we get a divorce? "Better work through the *unconscious meaning* of divorce first."

Because the fact was that we'd reached that crucial time in a marriage (five years and the sheets you got as wedding presents have just about worn thin) when it's time to decide

whether to buy new sheets, have a baby perhaps, and live with each other's lunacy ever after—or else give up the ghost of the marriage (throw out the sheets) and start playing musical beds all over again.

The decision was, of course, further complicated by analysis—the basic assumption of analysis being (and never mind all the evidence to the contrary) that you're getting better all the time. The refrain goes something like this:

"Oh-I-was-self-destructive-when-I-married-you-baby-but-I'm-so-much-more-healthy-now-ow-ow-ow."

(Implying that you might just choose someone better, sweeter, handsomer, smarter, and maybe even luckier in the stock market.)

To which he might reply:

"Oh-I-hated-all-women-when-I-fell-for-you-baby-but-I'm-so-much-more-healthy-now-ow-ow-ow."

(Implying that he might just find someone sweeter, prettier, smarter, a better cook, and maybe even due to inherit piles of bread from her father.)

"Wise up Bennett, old boy," I'd say—(whenever I suspected him of thinking those thoughts), "you'd probably marry someone even more phallic, castrating, and narcissistic than I am." (First technique of being a shrink's wife is knowing how to hurl all their jargon back at them, at carefully chosen moments.)

But I was having those thoughts myself and if Bennett knew, he didn't let on. Something seemed very wrong in our marriage. Our lives ran parallel like railroad tracks, Bennett spent the day at his office, his hospital, his analyst, and then evenings at his office again, usually until nine or ten. I taught a couple of days a week and wrote the rest of the time. My teaching schedule was light, the writing was exhausting, and by the time Bennett came home, I was ready to go out and break loose. I had had plenty of solitude, plenty of long hours alone with my typewriter and my fantasies. And I seemed to meet men everywhere. The world seemed crammed with available, interesting men in a way it never had been before I was married.

What was it about marriage anyway? Even if you loved your husband, there came that inevitable year when fucking him turned as bland as Velveeta cheese: filling, fattening even, but no thrill to the taste buds, no bittersweet edge, no danger. And you longed for an overripe Camembert, a rare goat cheese: luscious, creamy, cloven-hoofed.

I was not against marriage. I believed in it in fact. It was necessary to have one best friend in a hostile world, one person you'd be loyal to no matter what, one person who'd always be loyal to you. But what about all those other longings which after a while marriage did nothing much to appease? The restlessness, the hunger, the thump in the gut, the thump in the cunt, the longing to be filled up, to be fucked through every hole, the yearning for dry champagne and wet kisses, for the smell of peonies in a penthouse on a June night, for the light at the end of the pier in *Gatsby*. . . . Not those things really—because you knew that the very rich were duller than you and me—but what those things evoked. The sardonic, bittersweet vocabulary of Cole Porter love songs, the sad sentimental Rogers and Hart lyrics, all the romantic nonsense you yearned for with half your heart and mocked bitterly with the other half.

Growing up female in America. What a liability! You grew up with your ears full of cosmetic ads, love songs, advice columns, whoroscopes, Hollywood gossip, and moral dilemmas on the level of TV soap operas. What litantes the advertisers of the good life chanted at you! What curious catechisms!

"Be kind to your behind." "Blush like you mean it." "Love your hair." "Want a better body? We'll rearrange the one you've got." "That shine on your face should come from him, not from your skin." "You've come a long way, baby." "How to score with every male in the zodiac." "The stars and sensual you." "To a man they say Cauty Sark." "A diamond is forever." "If you're concerned about douching . . ." "Length and coolness come together." "How I solved my intimate odor problem." "Lady be cool." "Every woman alive loves Chanel No. 5." "What makes a shy girl get intimate?" "*Femme*, we named it after you."

What all the ads and all the whoroscopes seemed to imply was that if only you were narcissistic enough, if only you took proper care of your smells, your hair, your boobs, your eyelashes, your armpits, your crotch, your stars, your scars, and your choice of Scotch in bars—you would meet a beautiful, powerful, potent, and rich man who would satisfy every longing, fill every hole, make your heart skip a beat (or stand still), make you misty, and fly you to the moon (preferably on gossamer wings), where you would live totally satisfied forever.

And the crazy part of it was that even if you were clever,

even if you spent your adolescence reading John Donne and Shaw, even if you studied history or zoology or physics and hoped to spend your life pursuing some difficult and challenging career—you still had a mind full of all the soupy longings that every high-school girl was awash in. It didn't matter, you see, whether you had an IQ of 170 or an IQ of 70, you were brainwashed all the same. Only the surface trappings were different. Only the talk was a little more sophisticated. Underneath it all, you longed to be annihilated by love, to be swept off your feet, to be filled up by a giant prick spouting sperm, soapsuds, silks and satins, and of course, money. Nobody bothered to tell you what marriage was really about. You weren't even provided, like European girls, with a philosophy of cynicism and practicality. You expected not to desire any other men after marriage. And you expected your husband not to desire any other women. Then the desires came and you were thrown into a panic of self-hatred. What an evil woman you were! How could you keep being infatuated with strange men? How could you study their bulging trousers like that? How could you sit at a meeting imagining how every man in the room would screw? How could you sit on a train fucking total strangers with your eyes? How could you do that to your husband? Did anyone ever tell you that maybe it had nothing whatever to do with your husband?

And what about those other longings which marriage stifled? Those longings to hit the open road from time to time, to discover whether you could still live alone inside your own cabin in the woods without going mad; to discover, in short, whether you were still whole after so many years of being half of something (like the back two legs of a horse outfit on the vaudeville stage).

Five years of marriage had made me itchy for all those things: itchy for men, and itchy for solitude. Itchy for sex and itchy for the life of a recluse. I knew my itches were contradictory—and that made things even worse. I knew my itches were un-American—and that made things still worse. It is heresy in America to embrace any way of life except as half of a couple. Solitude is un-American. It may be condoned in a man—especially if he is a "glamorous bachelor" who "dates starlets" during a brief interval between marriages. But a woman is always presumed to be alone as a result of abandonment, not choice. And she is treated that way: as a pariah. There is simply no dignified way for a woman to

live alone. Oh, she can get along financially perhaps (though not nearly as well as a man), but emotionally she is never left in peace. Her friends, her family, her fellow workers never let her forget that her husbandlessness, her childlessness—her *selfishness*, in short—is a reproach to the American way of life.

Even more to the point: the woman (unhappy though she knows her married friends to be) can never let *herself* alone. She lives as if she were constantly on the brink of some great fulfillment. As if she were waiting for Prince Charming to take her away "from all this." All what? The solitude of living inside her own soul? The certainty of being herself instead of half of something else?

My response to all this was not (not yet) to have an affair and not (not yet) to hit the open road, but to evolve my fantasy of the Zipless Fuck. The zipless fuck was more than a fuck. It was a platonic ideal. Zipless because when you came together zippers fell away like rose petals, underwear blew off in one breath like dandelion fluff. Tongues intertwined and turned liquid. Your whole soul flowed out through your tongue and into the mouth of your lover.

For the true, ultimate zipless A-1 fuck, it was necessary that you never get to know the man very well. I had noticed, for example, how all my infatuations dissolved as soon as I really became friends with a man, became sympathetic to his problems, listened to him *kvetch* about his wife, or ex-wives, his mother, his children. After that I would like him, perhaps even love him—but without passion. And it was passion that I wanted. I had also learned that a sure way to exorcise an infatuation was to write about someone, to observe his ticks and twitches, to anatomize his personality in type. After that he was an insect on a pin, a newspaper clipping laminated in plastic. I might enjoy his company, even admire him at moments, but he no longer had the power to make me wake up trembling in the middle of the night. I no longer dreamed about him. He had a face.

So another condition for the zipless fuck was brevity. And anonymity made it even better.

During the time I lived in Heidelberg I commuted to Frankfurt four times a week to see my analyst. The ride took an hour each way and trains became an important part of my fantasy life. I kept meeting beautiful men on the train, men who scarcely spoke English, men whose clichés and banalities were hidden by my ignorance of French, or Italian, or

even German. Much as I hate to admit it, there are some beautiful men in Germany.

One scenario of the zipless fuck was perhaps inspired by an Italian movie I saw years ago. As time went by, I embellished it to suit my head. It used to play over and over again as I shuffled back and forth from Heidelberg to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt to Heidelberg:

A grimy European train compartment (Second Class). The seats are leatherette and hard. There is a sliding door to the corridor outside. Olive trees rush by the window. Two Sicilian peasant women sit together on one side with a child between them. They appear to be mother and grandmother and granddaughter. Both women vie with each other to stuff the little girl's mouth with food. Across the way (in the window seat) is a pretty young widow in a heavy black veil and tight black dress which reveals her voluptuous figure. She is sweating profusely and her eyes are puffy. The middle seat is empty. The corridor seat is occupied by an enormously fat woman with a moustache. Her huge haunches cause her to occupy almost half of the vacant center seat. She is reading a pulp romance in which the characters are photographed models and the dialogue appears in little puffs of smoke above their heads.

This fivesome bounces along for a while, the widow and the fat woman keeping silent, the mother and grandmother talking to the child and each other about the food. And then the train screeches to a halt in a town called (perhaps) CORLEONE. A tall languid-looking soldier, unshaven, but with a beautiful mop of hair, a cleft chin, and somewhat devilish, lazy eyes, enters the compartment, looks insolently around, sees the empty half-seat between the fat woman and the widow, and, with many flirtatious apologies, sits down. He is sweaty and disheveled but basically a gorgeous hunk of flesh, only slightly rancid from the heat. The train screeches out of the station.

Then we become aware only of the bouncing of the train and the rhythmic way the soldier's thighs are rubbing against the thighs of the widow. Of course, he is also rubbing against the haunches of the fat lady—and she is

trying to move away from him—watching the widow's sary because he is unaware of her haunches. He is watching the large gold cross between the widow's breasts swing back and forth in her deep cleavage. Bump. Pause. Bump. It hits one moist breast and then the other. It seems to hesitate in between as if paralyzed between two repelling magnets. The pit and the pendulum. He is hypnotized. She stares out the window, looking at each olive tree as if she had never seen olive trees before. He rises awkwardly, half-bows to the ladies, and struggles to open the window. When he sits down again his arm accidentally grazes the widow's belly. She appears not to notice. He rests his left hand on the seat between his thigh and hers and begins to wind rubber fingers around and under the soft flesh of her thigh. She continues staring at each olive tree as if she were God and had just made them and were wondering what to call them.

Meanwhile the enormously fat lady is packing away her pulp romance in an iridescent green plastic string bag full of smelly cheeses and blackening bananas. And the grandmother is rolling ends of salami in greasy newspaper. The mother is putting on the little girl's sweater and wiping her face with a handkerchief, lovingly moistened with maternal spittle. The train screeches to a stop in a town called (perhaps) PRIZZI, and the fat lady, the mother, the grandmother, and the little girl leave the compartment. Then the train begins to move again. The gold cross begins to bump, pause, bump between the widow's moist breasts, the fingers begin to curl under the widow's thighs, the widow continues to stare at the olive trees. Then the fingers are sliding between her thighs and they are parting her thighs, and they are moving upward into the fleshy gap between her heavy black stockings and her garters, and they are sliding up under her garters into the damp unpanned place between her legs.

The train enters a *galleria*, or tunnel, and in the semi-darkness the symbolism is consummated. There is the soldier's boot in the air and the dark walls of the tunnel and the hypnotic rocking of the train and the long high whistle as it finally emerges.

Wordlessly, she gets off at a town called, perhaps, BYONA. She crosses the tracks, stepping carefully over them in her narrow black shoes and heavy black stockings. He stares after her as if he were Adam wondering what to name her. Then he jumps up and dashes out of the train in pursuit of her. At that very moment a long freight train pulls through the parallel track obscuring his view and blocking his way. Twenty-five freight cars later, she has vanished forever.

One scenario of the zipless fuck.

Zipless, you see, *not* because European men have button-flies rather than zipper-flies, and not because the participants are so devastatingly attractive, but because the incident has all the swift compression of a dream and is seemingly free of all remorse and guilt; because there is no talk of her late husband or of his fiancée; because there is no rationalizing; because there is no talk at all. The zipless fuck is absolutely pure. It is free of ulterior motives. There is no power game. The man is not "taking" and the woman is not "giving." No one is attempting to cuckold a husband or humiliate a wife. No one is trying to prove anything or get anything out of anyone. The zipless fuck is the purest thing there is. And it is rarer than the unicorn. And I have never had one. Whenever it seemed I was close, I discovered a horse with a papier-mâché horn, or two clowns in a unicorn suit. Alessandro, my Florentine friend, came close. But he was, after all, one clown in a unicorn suit. Consider this tapestry, my life.

being back in Germany. I was already wishing we hadn't returned.

At about three-thirty we got up and rather languidly made love in one of the single beds. I still felt that I was dreaming and kept pretending Bennett was somebody yelse. But who? I couldn't get a clear picture of him. I never could. Who was this phantom man who haunted my life? My father? My German analyst? The zipless fuck? Why did his face always refuse to come into focus?

By four o'clock, we were on the *Strassenbahn* bound for the University of Vienna to register for the Congress. The day had turned out to be clear with blue skies and absurdly fluffy white clouds. And I was clumping along the streets in my high-heeled sandals, hating the Germans, and hating Bennett for not being a stranger on a train, for not smiling, for being such a good lay but never kissing me, for getting me shrink appointments and Pap smears and IBM electric's, but never buying me flowers. And not talking to me. And never grabbing my ass anymore. And never going down on me, ever. What do you expect after five years of marriage anyway? Giggling in the dark? Ass-grabbing? Cunt-eating? Well at least an occasional one. What do you women want? Freud puzzled this and never came up with much. How do you ladies like to be laid? A man who'll go down on you when you have your period? A man who'll kiss you before you brush your teeth in the morning and not say *Yiitich?* A man who'll laugh with you when the lights go out?

A stiff prick, Freud said, assuming that *their* obsession was *our* obsession.

Phallocentric, someone once said of Freud. He thought the sun revolved around the penis. And the daughter, too.

And who could protest? Until women started writing books there was only one side of the story. Throughout all of history, books were written with sperm, not menstrual blood. Until I was twenty-one, I measured my orgasms against Lady Chatterley's and wondered what was *wrong* with me. Did it ever occur to me that Lady Chatterley was really a man? That she was really D. H. Lawrence?

Phallocentric. The trouble with men and also the trouble with women. A friend of mine recently found this in a fortune cookie:

THE TROUBLE WITH MEN IS MEN,
THE TROUBLE WITH WOMEN, MEN.

Once, just to impress Bennett, I told him about the Hell's An-

gels initiation ceremony. The part where the initiate has to go down on his woman while she has her period and while all the other guys watch.

Bennett said nothing.

"Well, isn't that interesting?" I nudged. "Isn't that a gas?"

Still nothing.

I kept nagging.

"Why don't you buy yourself a little dog," he finally said,

"and train him."

"I ought to report you to the New York Psychoanalytic," I said.

The medical building of the University of Vienna is col-unned, cold, cavernous. We trudged up a long flight of steps. Upstairs, dozens of shrinks were milling around the registration desk.

An officious Austrian girl in harlequin glasses and a red dirndl was giving everyone trouble about their credentials for registration. She spoke painstakingly schoolbook English. I was positive she must be the wife of one of the Austrian candidates. She couldn't have been more than twenty-five but she smiled with all the smugness of a *Frau Doktor*.

I showed her my letter from *Voyeur Magazine*, but she wouldn't let me register.

"Why?"

"Because we are not authorized to admit Press," she sneered. "I am so sorry."

"I'll bet."

I could feel the anger gather inside my head like steam in a pressure cooker. The Nazi bitch, I thought, the goddamned Kraut.

Bennett shot me a look which said: *calm down*. He hates it when I get angry at people in public. But his trying to hold me back only made me more furious.

"Look—if you don't let me in I'll write about *that*, too." I knew that once the meetings got started I could probably walk right in without a badge—so it really didn't matter. Besides, I scarcely cared all that much about writing the article. I was a spy from the outside world. A spy in the house of analysis.

"I'm sure you don't want me to write about how the analysts are *scared* of admitting writers to their meetings, do you?"

"I'm so sorry," the Austrian bitch kept repeating. "But I really haff not got za ausrorty to admit you. . . ."

I go to the Art Students League every Saturday and my mother painstakingly criticizes my drawings. She shepherds my career as if it were her own: I must learn cast and figure drawing in charcoal first, then still lifes in pastels, then finally oil painting. When I apply for the High School of Music and Art, my mother worries over my portfolio with me, takes me to the exam, and reassures me, as I worriedly recalculate each part of it to her. When I decide I want to be a doctor as well as an artist, she starts buying me books on biology. When I start writing poetry, she listens to each poem and praises it as if I were Yeats. All my adolescent manderings are beautiful to her. All my drawings, greeting cards, cartoons, posters, oil paintings prestage future greatness to her. Surely no girl could have a more devoted mother, a mother more interested in her becoming a whole person, in becoming, if she wished, an artist. Then why am I so furious with her? And why does she make me feel that I am nothing but a hurried carbon copy of her? That I have never had a single thought of my own? That I have no freedom, no independence, no identity at all?

Perhaps sex accounted for my fury. Perhaps sex was the real Pandora's box. My mother believed in free love, in dancing naked in the Bois de Boulogne, in dancing in the Greek Isles, in performing the Rites of Spring. Yet of course, she did not, or why did she say that boys wouldn't respect me unless I "played hard to get"? That boys wouldn't chase me if I wore my heart on my sleeve, that boys wouldn't call me if I "made myself cheap"?

Sex. I was terrified of the tremendous power it had over me. The energy, the excitement, the power to make me feel totally crazy! What about that? How do you make that jibe with "playing hard to get"?

I never had the courage to ask my mother directly. I sensed, despite her bohemian talk, that she disapproved of sex, and it was basically unmentionable. So I turned to D. H. Lawrence, and to *Love Without Fear*, and to *Coring of Age* by Sarmol, Margaret Mead wasn't much help. What did I have in common with all those savages? (Plenty, of course, but at the time I didn't realize it.) Enstace Chesser, M.D., was good at all the fascinating details ("How to Manage the Sex Act," venereation, foreplay, afterglow), but he didn't seem to have

much to say about my moral dilemmas: how "far" to go? inside the bra or outside? inside the pants or outside? inside the mouth or outside? when to swallow, if ever. It was all so complicated. And it seemed so much more complicated for women. Basically, I think, I was furious with my mother for not teaching me how to be a woman, for not teaching me how to make peace between the raging hunger in my cunt and the hunger in my head.

So I learned about women from men. I saw them through the eyes of male writers. Of course, I didn't think of them as male writers. I thought of them as *writers*, as authorities, as gods who knew and were to be trusted completely.

Naturally I trusted everything they said, even when it implied my own inferiority. I learned what an orgasm was from D. H. Lawrence, disguised as Lady Chatterley. I learned from him that all women worship "the Phallos"—as he so quaintly spelled it. I learned from Shaw that women never can be artists; I learned from Dostoyevsky that they have no religious feeling; I learned from Swift and Pope that they have too much religious feeling (and therefore can never be quite rational); I learned from Faulkner that they are earth mothers and at one with the moon and the tides and the crops; I learned from Freud that they have deficient superegos and are ever "incomplete" because they lack the one thing in this world worth having: a penis.

But what did all this have to do with me—who went to school and got better marks than the boys and painted and wrote and spent Saturdays doing still lifes at the Art Students League and my weekday afternoons editing the high-school paper (Features Editor; the Editor-in-Chief had never been a girl—though it also never occurred to us then to question it)? What did the moon and tides and earth-mothering and the worship of the Lawrentian "phallos" have to do with me or with my life?

I met my first "phallos" at thirteen years and ten months on my parents' avocado-green silk living-room couch, in the shade of an avocado-green avocado tree, grown by my avocado green-thumbed mother from an avocado pit. The "phallos" belonged to Steve Applebaum, a junior and art major when I was a freshman and art major, and it had a most memorable abstract design of blue veins on its Kandinsky-purple underside. In retrospect, it was a remarkable specimen: circumcised, of course, and huge (what is huge when you have no frame of reference?), and with an impressive

life of its own. As soon as it began to make its drumlike presence known under the tight zipper of Steve's chinos (we were necking and "petting-below-the-waist" as one said then), he would slowly unzip (so as not to snag it?) and with one hand (the other was under my skirt and up my cunt) extract the huge purple thing from between the layers of his shorts, his blue Brooks-Brothers shirttails, and his cold, glittering, metal-zipped fly. Then I would dip one hand into the vase of roses my flower-loving mother always kept on the coffee table, and with a right hand moistened with water and the slime from their stems, I would proceed with my rhythmic jerking off of Steve. How exactly did I do it? Three fingers? Or the whole palm? I suppose I must have been rough at first (though later I became an expert). He would throw his head back in ecstasy (but controlled ecstasy: my father was watching TV in the dining room) and would come into his Brooks-Brothers shirttails or into a handkerchief quickly produced for this purpose. The technique I have forgotten, but the feeling remains. Partly, it was reciprocity (tit for tat, or cilt for tat), but it was also power. I knew that what I was doing gave me a special kind of power over him—one that painting or writing couldn't approach. And then I was coming too—maybe not like Lady Chatterley, but it was something.

Toward the end of our idyll, Steve (who was then seventeen and I fourteen) wanted me to take "it" in my mouth.

"Do people really do that?"
 "Sure," he said with as much nonchalance as he could muster. He went to my parents' bookshelf in search of Van de Velde (carefully hidden behind *Art Treasures of the Renaissance*). But it was too much for me. I couldn't even pronounce it. And would it make me pregnant? Or maybe my refusal had something to do with the continuing social education which my mother was instilling in me along with Art History. Steve lived in the Bronx. I lived in a duplex on Central Park West. If I was going to worship a "phallos" it was not going to be a Bronx phallos. Perhaps one from Sutton Place?

Ultimately, I said goodbye to Steve and took up masturbation, fasting, and poetry. I kept telling myself that masturbation at least kept me pure.
 Steve continued to woo me with bottles of Chanel No. 5, Frank Sinatra records, and beautifully lettered quotations from the poems of Yeats. He called me whenever he got

crossing was where to fuck. My cabin was out, since the French nurse seemed to sleep all day and the English and German ladies retired at nine. Once we tried skipping lunch so as to have Charlie's cabin while all three old codgers were out eating, but one of them came back and rattled the door angrily just as we were getting started. So we began scouring the ship for places to fuck. We were that determined. You'd think it would be easy on an old ship as full of nooks and crannies as the *Queen Elizabeth*, but it wasn't. The linen closets were locked, the lifeboats were too high to climb into, the public rooms were too public, the nursery was full of toddlers, and we couldn't find any empty cabins. I suggested using one of the first-class cabins while the people were out, but Charlie was chicken.

"What if they come back?" he asked.

"They'd probably be too embarrassed to say anything anyway—or else they'd automatically think they were in the wrong cabin and by the time they searched around and found the steward, we'd be gone."

Jesus, was I a pragmatist compared to Charlie! What a scaredy cat he was! My fear of flying, after all, lets me ride on planes as long as I agree to suffer through the whole flight in terror, but *his* fear of flying was so bad that he wouldn't even go near a plane. That was how we wound up in this predicament in the first place.

But we finally found a place. The only deserted place on board. An absolutely perfect place—both symbolically and practically (except that it had no bed): the Jewish Chapel in tourist class.

"This is fantastic!" I yelled when we fumbled for the light and realized what room it was we had found. What a setting! Pews! A Star of David! Even a Torah—for Christ's sake! I was really turned on.

"I'll just pretend I'm a vestal virgin or something," I said, starting to unzip Charlie.

"But there's no lock on the door!" he protested.

"Who's going to come in here anyway? Certainly not all our WASP fellow-travelers and Anglican crewmen. Besides, we can just turn out the light again. Anyone who stumbles in will think we're *darvining* or something. What do they know about Jewish services?"

"They'll probably mistake you for the burning bush," he said snidely.

"Very funny." I was stepping out of my underpants and switching off the light.

But we only got to screw in the sight of God once, because the next day when we returned to our little temple of love, we found it padlocked. We never knew why. Charlie, of course, was *sure* (in his paranoid fashion) that somebody (God?) had photographed our vigorous coupling and also tape recorded all our moans. He spent the rest of the trip panicked. He was *positive* we'd be met in Le Havre by an Interpol vice squad.

The remainder of the crossing was pretty dull for me. Charlie sat in one of the lounges studying his scores and conducting imaginary musicians, while I watched him, seething with resentment about Sally, who I was sure he intended to see in Paris. I tried to put it out of my mind but it kept popping up like a candy wrapper which refuses to sink into Central Park Lake. What could I do? I tried writing but concentration was beyond me. All I could think of was Sally—that super-phony. She was keeping Charlie on the hook like Charlie was keeping *me* on the hook. All the problems of love are problems of maldistribution, goddamn it. There's plenty to go around, but it always goes to the wrong people, at the wrong times, in the wrong places. The loved get more love and the unloved get more unloved. The closer we got to France, the more I included myself among the latter.

Of course, Charlie lost the conducting competition. And in the first round. Despite his ostentatious studying, he never could remember scores. He was not cut out to be a conductor, either. On the podium, he always seemed to go as limp as he had that first night in bed. His whole body sagged. His shoulders curled over and his back arched like an overcooked cannelloni which had lost its stuffing. Poor Charlie had no charisma. The opposite of Brian exactly. I often thought (while watching Charlie perform) that if only he could have had a little of Brian's charisma he would have been phenomenal. Brian, of course, had no talent for music. But if only I could have combined them! Why do I always wind up with two men who would make one great man? Is that somehow the secret of my Oedipal problem? My father and my grandfather? My father who always goes off to play the piano when things get hot and my grandfather who hangs in there like the fireball he is, arguing Marxism, Modernism, Darwinism or any other ism—as if his life depended on it?

Am I doomed to spend my life running between two men?

Fear of Flying

Reviewing Jong's novel in the *New Yorker*, John Updike wrote: '*Fear of Flying* feels like a winner. It has class and sass, brightness and bite.' The novel went on to sell 6,000,000 copies and establish Jong as something of a notorious presence in the American literary scene. It begins with the heroine, Isadora Zelda White Stoller Wing, in flight en route to a convention of psychoanalysts in Vienna. She is accompanying her husband, Bennett, but leaves him shortly after their arrival to take up with Adrian Goodlove, an Englishman with whom she conducts a strenuous affair in various locations throughout Europe. Her erotic adventures with Adrian form the bulk of the picaresque narrative.

Fear of Flying is a book which means different things to different people. It can be read as the *Bildungsroman* of a woman poet, a rather visceral comedy of modern manners, or even as a gesture of Jewish rebellion

against the Nazi legacy left behind in Europe. However, its notoriety derives from the Grail of Isadora's quest – the 'zipless fuck'. Jong's descriptions of sex from a specifically feminine point of view are graphic, free from any inhibiting sense of decorum, and often uncomfortably recognisable. The zipless fuck for which Isadora searches represents sex without constraint, without involvement and (therefore) without regret. On its publication in America, the novel was hotly debated by the feminist movement, some sections of which saw in Isadora's relentless search for fulfilment a barely veiled admission of womanly incompleteness and in her ready abandonment of sexual morals the reduction of herself to sex-object.

Although the charge that it reinforced sexual stereotypes is probably unjust (in one scene a male lover avoids Isadora's advances by feigning a headache), the book can be seen as the sexual glamorisation of what is still a serious debate – that is, the role of heterosexual feminists in their relations with (non-feminist) men. The correctives to this view have largely gone unremarked. Isadora's refusal to be passive is an important resistance, while Jong's oblique identification of the experience of women and Jews – both are seen as suffering, dispersed populations – refutes the charge of mere prurience. It is also worth noting that many of the more sexually explicit scenes play on the habitual scenarios of modern pornography in a very knowing way; in a plane, in a train, on a ship, in a church, etc.

Ultimately, the catalogue of locations where the zipless fuck might have taken place (but did not) becomes exhausting. Isadora realises belatedly that the sexual freedom she has found comes only at the price of confinement within her relationship with Adrian. The novel ends with Isadora returning to her husband, speculating on how their relationship will turn out. This formed the starting-point of her second novel, *How to Save Your Own Life* (1977), in which Jong confronted many of the issues left so successfully unresolved in *Fear of Flying*.

Erica Jong

1942-

American novelist, short story writer, and poet.

Fear of Flying (novel, 1973)

Isadora Wing, the protagonist of this popular and controversial work, is a woman in search of self and satisfaction. As a writer, she grapples with the problems of creativity; as a woman, she finds herself restless in a conventional marriage and longing to explore the radical possibilities outlined in her fantasies. The novel opens in Vienna, where she leaves her psychiatrist husband in search of liberation. She meets the free-wheeling Adrian Goodlove, who preaches about the joys of open relationships and encourages Isadora to divorce her husband. However, after several weeks, she realizes that Adrian's concepts of love are no more open than the restrictions of marriage. She has a number of ultimately meaningless sexual relationships and feels stymied in her search for both sexual freedom and direction as an artist. At the novel's end, Isadora is offered the guilt-free physical encounter that she had once dreamed of. Repelled, she rebuffs the man, and contemplates her disillusionment.

The novel shocked readers upon its publication, for Jong employed vivid, often graphic language in chronicling her heroine's sexual escapades. Yet for all its bawdy humor, the novel contains a serious exploration of the dilemma of a modern woman who, dissatisfied with the traditional path for her as artist or lover, longs and reaches for more.

L.L. Harris, Characters in 20th-Century Literature, Gale R. p204

P. Parker, ed., *A Reader's Guide to the 20th Century Novel*, OUP, p4