

VANESSA RUSSELL

Back in the day, when I came into my feminist politics, there sure were a lot of rules, with even more instructors in their uniforms. I learned quickly that feminism was merely the theory and lesbianism was the almighty practice.

At women's events, heaps of lesbian feminists donned their gay apparel. Plaid shirts, jeans or dungarees, camel-coloured construction boots.

Well, I picked myself up by my construction bootstraps and researched how to be the best lesbian ever. At least half of my efforts failed miserably. I was a superb lesbian, but only from the neck up.

I suffered through countless girlfriends and I'm sure they suffered through me. Thank the lesbian feminist goddess that all those shenanigans ended when Patty and I became lovers after being friends and colleagues for fifteen years.

My mum told me that she wasn't surprised in the least that Patty and I ended up together. She remembered me talking about *all* those late work nights. I didn't have the heart to tell her that we were actually working really hard and not cruising each other. Mum had never seen me so smitten and she was thrilled, she grew to love Patty in a very short time.

Although none of us knew this at the time, Patty and I tumbled into love during the last four months of my Mum's life. My heart exploded for Patty at the same time it shattered for my Mom, as she became increasingly diminished. One body, my body, held an impossible paradox. Psychic pain and pleasure. Despair and joy. It's funny how life's like that.

Near the end, Patty and I spent hours in the hospital with my Mom. Exhausted at the end of the day, we would return to my sister Tee's house. One freezing January night, in the snow belt of London, Ontario, we headed for the woods behind Tee's house just to shake off the grief of the day and get some air.

The creek there was completely frozen over and we set out across it, to get a better look at the night sky. That's when Patty began to sing to me, something I've learned since then she doesn't do. She sang a song I hadn't heard before: Laura Smith's reworked version of *My Bonny*.

*Soon, there'll be no difference between the land and the water,
I can walk on the ice to places I've never been,
and I'll walk home singing,
My Bonny lies over the ocean.*

As Patty continued to sing, she held me as I wept, right there on the frozen creek, with the moon high in the black sky, a spray of stars across it. Today, whenever we hear that song, I remember my Mom, and Patty and I dance, no matter where we are, no matter what we're doing.

I no longer embody those two impossible truths. Instead, I just let go and marinate in love.