



10,000 Men of Harvard

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10,000 Men of Harvard

Eva Moseley

Ten thousand men of Harvard

Want vict'ry today,

For they know that o'er old Eli

Fair Harvard holds sway;

So then we'll conquer old Eli's men

And when the game ends we'll sing again:

Ten thousand men of Harvard

Gained victory today.

--Harvard football "fight" song

There were no men, except some professors, at Mount Holyoke, so after four years of famine, I looked forward to a relative feast at Harvard, when I began graduate study there in 1953. Was the ratio 10:1, 20:1, 100:1? It was, at any rate, a lot of men per woman, especially in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where I had come to earn a degree in Sanskrit and Indian Studies. In those days I wasn't thinking in feminist terms about why there were so few women, but in female terms about possible friends, admirers, lovers. Sometimes there was a steady stream--literally, as one admirer came in the door of my rooming house, 52 Irving Street, as another was leaving. But so many

men meant what it always tends to mean: some friendships, some less-than-wonderful sex, being pursued by those I didn't care for, longing for those who didn't care for me--or who did but were committed to other women.

I was not a self-defined feminist till the early 1970s. My aim while in graduate school was to learn Sanskrit so as to read the *Upanishads* and other texts in the original, but for personal, “spiritual” reasons more than scholarly, professional ones; when I thought of working I imagined being someone’s assistant, a man’s, perhaps my (eventual) husband’s. I wanted marriage and children and probably did not long for a solo, stellar career because of the situation I had grown up with: my mother had a career (as a couturier--she was more than a dressmaker) and to a large extent neglected her children, and my parents were divorced when I was 14. My father worked too, but my mother was the one with the vocation. So I was evidently looking for the opposite of what I had known, and surely Harvard, with its 10,000 men, was a likely place to find one essential ingredient.

There were many places to look for men while learning Sanskrit grammar and its wonderful script--a syllabary rather than an alphabet, called *Devanagari* (City of the Gods). Because the Sanskrit library, in room A on the top floor of Widener Library (where it still is, and where Professor Daniel H. H. Ingalls taught elementary Sanskrit) was too small and quiet, and the Widener reading room too big and distracting (with a constant shuffle and buzz of chairs, whispers, footsteps), I came to frequent the Harvard-Yenching Library, then in Boylston Hall, which also held some of the books I needed: on Buddhism, on Chinese poetry. There I met Peter and other budding scholars of East Asia.

Peter became a friend, a sort of little brother. In his family in Taiwan he was the first-born son and so a little big shot, but here the arrogance to which he was trained mingled uncomfortably with a wistful sense of inferiority. He was not going to marry a Chinese woman, he told me repeatedly, but he worried about his ability to satisfy a Caucasian wife. Unable either to agree or reassuringly disagree, I just listened with interest and sympathy to such endearing and repellent frankness. From Peter I first heard of ginseng; he told me with great relish that it not only is used to restore women's health after childbirth, but also is considered to be a potent aphrodisiac.

Peter shared an apartment at 367 Harvard Street. The building, with its bow windows, is still there, probably still full of students. He invited me for supper and I watched him stir-fry Chinese cabbage in a cast-iron frying pan: some oil, soy sauce, a pinch of sugar, a few moments with a spatula and it was done. It was a revelation. I'm not sure I had ever eaten Chinese food before and certainly had never seen it prepared. The term "stir-fry" was then unheard of and most American cooks boiled cabbage.

Peter's family was among those Chinese who had migrated to Taiwan from Fukien Province late in the Ming Dynasty. Sandwiched between the indigenous Taiwanese, whom he looked down on, and the recently arrived *Kuomintang* (who came over with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, when the Communists won the civil war), whom he hated, Peter was full of bitter thoughts and doubts about his future. He hated the Japanese too, as these "Ocean Dwarfs" had occupied his homeland before and during World War II. Yet his dissertation was about the creation of the Japanese Imperial Army, so he likely had the same sort of love-hate connection to things Japanese as I do to the German language,

having been thrown out of Austria by the Nazis for being Jewish. (My parents and brother and I arrived in New York early in 1939; we were among the relatively few lucky ones.) In 1957-1958, I sweated over the tortured English of Peter's first draft, spending many hours editing, and others trying to get him to clarify what he meant to convey.

In the introduction to his dissertation, he thanks two professors especially, Edwin O. Reischauer and Benjamin I. Schwartz. About Reischauer particularly he can hardly say enough: "He permitted me to intrude upon him in his office, to seek his advice or have him listen to my views. . . . he always bore with my brashness [*sic*] and listened patiently to my ideas." These effusive thanks were surely deserved, for it took great patience to deal with Peter, brash and humble, superior and needy as he was. He gave me my due very briefly, listing me among the three friends who "helped me to express my thoughts in English more effectively."

For me, Peter didn't figure as a man, and there were others like that as well. Though I cooked in my room quite often, sometimes I'd go to Harkness Commons, the graduate dining hall renowned for its Bauhaus architecture and its terrible, but cheap, food. There I met various chaps while lining up for supper, among them classics student Marc.

Along with elementary Sanskrit and other courses on India, I was trying to keep up my Greek with a course on *The Republic*. When Marc found out that I was having trouble with Plato, he invited me to his rooms on Farrar Street so he could help me with the Greek. He was probably in his thirties but already an old fussbudget. As I held his copy of the book, one of my sweaty fingers left a smudge in the margin. Clucking

accusingly, he hurried to find an eraser and made the page pristine again. Why were we using his *Republic* rather than mine? I don't know, but the fact that he couldn't wait to clean up the book till I'd left made him as distasteful to me as the smudge was to him. By mutual if silent consent there were no more Greek lessons, but he did take me to lunch at Henri IV (pronounced à *la française*), an elegant and very French restaurant in a wood-frame house in Harvard Square. He was a regular there and was known as Monsieur Marc.

But there were other chaps who did figure as *men*, or who I thought might, or who thought they might. The International Student Center was on Garden Street, in a building later devoted to Transcendental Meditation and now part of the Longy School of Music. My housemate Sylvia Slotnick, then called Pinky, and I went to a mixer there and got mixed up with three charming gents from the British Commonwealth: John from England, Neville from Australia, and Ken from Canada. Neville was the best looking of the three and as I recall a rather simple, direct sort, a scientist. Going home on a bitter cold night once, I met him near Oxford Street coming from the lab. He wore no coat, only a tweed jacket, and when I remarked on his meager dress he showed me, between shirt buttons, that he wasn't wearing an undershirt. He was warmer than I with all my warm layers. Neville and I must have dated a bit because I recall his saying goodnight at the foot of the stairs at 52 Irving Street. I was wearing my new red leather jacket from Ohrbach's, so new that it creaked as he embraced me. "Get rid of the jacket," said Neville with a last friendly peck, but I didn't, and it was my son who wore it to tatters three decades later.

But Ken was the one who appealed to me the most, and I more or less threw myself at him. He was, I think, flattered but full of doubt. We did some necking once in his room in one of the older graduate dorms on Oxford Street--till his roommate appeared, to Ken's embarrassment and relief. He made sure it didn't happen again. There was perhaps a little regret--after all, I was there and willing--but he didn't like being unfaithful to his fiancée who was not there.

My international brigade also included an Egyptian whom I found baffling, a world-weary philosopher from El Salvador, one or two fellow refugees, and a barrel-chested European gent who invited me to his room on Broadway, put on a record and got me to dance with him. It felt artificial, awkward, annoying. He evidently expected the rest to follow and was amazed and contemptuous when, instead of succumbing, I extricated myself and escaped. My heart was pounding with (as I interpret it now) both fear of someone strong enough to pursue and subdue me if he chose and anxiety caused by my own hubris at saying no to a man. His attitude seemed to be: How can you be so stupid as to turn down such an offer from me?

I was heartbroken for a while over Robert, a freshman who lived in the garret of one of the big houses on upper Irving Street. His older brother, Paul, had a room in number 50, Pinky's side of our double rooming house. He and Pinky were an item for a time, while I hankered after Bobby, who had just graduated from High Mowing School in New Hampshire and was blond, guitar-playing, not exactly handsome but somehow romantic. Bobby was unsure of what he wanted to do with his life--appropriate enough for a freshman--but he was quite sure that he did not want to be romantically involved

with me. I consoled myself, sort of, with Guido, a law student who lived down the hall. There was no real feeling on either side, though.

So I was ready for the would-be major romance of my two years at GSAS, which began one warm spring evening as Pinky and I were wandering about the Old Yard. We sometimes fed the squirrels there, and once, when I was wearing a dress mother had made, of denim striped black, brown, and gray, a squirrel jumped up on my skirt for a moment, evidently mistaking me for a tree trunk. This evening, though, we paused near Hollis Hall, one of the (then all-male) freshman dorms. Someone called down from an upper window and he soon appeared, an excruciatingly handsome--or so I thought then--young man, John. He was from Kansas City and, like Bobby, four years younger than I.

He was evidently attracted; I was smitten. But there wasn't much to it, partly because he had a serious girlfriend at Radcliffe. John later sent me a photo of himself with an older man, whom I take to be his father, striding down what is presumably a Kansas City street, both looking quite at home and entitled. Perhaps it was this quality, along with the triple-barreled name - in those days Jews, at least those I knew, tended to make do with just two names - and of course the golden hair and good build and handsome face that captivated me, though I wasn't conscious of it then: that air, and indeed fact, of belonging to a dominant class, which, like most Jews almost anywhere and as refugees here, my family and I had to do without.

There were only a few encounters, but I continued to carry something of a torch for him, and we carried on some sort of a correspondence, probably a sporadic and lopsided one. There was even talk of going to Ireland together one summer; I recall

shopping for a drip-dry blouse at Macy's, one that would go with everything. I had the blouse for years, and a recipe for Irish soda bread that John gave me, but nothing came of the trip.

Then in 1957, when he was still an undergraduate, I visited Cambridge and we spent part of an afternoon together, walking around Harvard and down by the river. There we encountered John Finley, whose course on *Oedipus Rex* I had taken in the spring of 1954. John knew him, too. Finley was walking his dog, just then running free, and as we chatted he twirled the leash and hit himself in the face with it. It made me wonder whether it is typical of performers--and Professor Finley was definitely a performer--to be quite self-possessed, in control, in front of an audience, but awkward in an individual encounter.

Even more than Professor Finley's leash, what made the afternoon memorable was that John told me--and he was as kind about it as he could manage--that he was about to marry his Radcliffe fiancée. This goodbye was devastating, even though I had thought that I neither expected nor even imagined any sort of life together for John and me. A friend was doing research at Houghton Library, and I was due to meet her at 5:00 when it closed. This was lucky, as she held me together. We went to see the movie *Giant*, and I found it soothingly distracting for most of its long length, till there was a wedding, and my own pathetic reality came flooding back. But I got over John soon enough, and, except for the continuing friendship with Peter, and despite my many years of working at the university later on, that was pretty much the end of my flirtation with Harvard men.

How typical were my views and expectations of men at Harvard? They were to some extent typical of the 1950s. Much as I detested the political timidity and general conformity of that decade, I was typical in my assumption that *la difference* is of ultimate significance, in relations between the sexes, division of labor, and everything else. Even Betty Friedan did not yet subscribe to the feminism she revealed a decade later. In my honors thesis at Mount Holyoke I had explored relations between men and women in the *Laws of Manu*, the Hindu social code, and found ample support for my views: *la difference* with a vengeance, one might say. So I was not ready to learn much from the evidence my male acquaintances presented me with.

Did it matter that these were Harvard men? I could have gone to Johns Hopkins, which also taught Sanskrit and also admitted me. Would my experience with men there have been any different? I doubt it. I would have brought with me the same memories and desires, and the elite and male sense of entitlement of most academic men was surely the same at Hopkins. It took the salutary upheaval of the women's liberation movement to shift my point of view, like that of so many others, toward the conviction that the common humanity of the sexes counts for much more than the differences.