Sex Talks to Girls

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Published by University of Wisconsin Press

Seaton, Maureen.
Sex Talks to Girls: A Memoir.
University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.
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Most days I just loved staying with Mars in Harlem. We had a tiny backyard where we put out a card table and had breakfast on Sunday mornings when the choir belted out gospel at the church one block over. I was becoming competent at grits, and Mars made the best fried chicken livers I’d ever had, well the only, but they were memorable. We had a two-burner hotplate, that was it, and I could cry thinking about the meals we created there. (Although, without an oven, we missed our biscuits.)

One time Mars wanted to take me to a soul food restaurant up on 135th. I was hesitant because that was deep Harlem and I felt like we were pushing our interracial luck already. But we walked up the sixteen blocks and ordered our food to go—and got our message loud and clear when we got home. The waitress had emptied the saltshaker on my dinner. It was one of those times I had to keep Mars from hurting someone. Those times happened about once a
day, wherever we were in the city. On one hand, it was a relief for me to be with a person who could access her anger in the time it takes to say *cheese grits*. But it was scary too, and I would often hug her to keep her grounded. *Come on, honey,* I’d say. *It’s not worth it.* Sometimes my voice helped. Sometimes she couldn’t hear a word I said and I’d stand against a building, hoping for an invisible cloak, while she chased some guy down the street for insulting us.

Once, she hailed a passing gypsy cab, practically threw me in the back seat, yelled *Go!* as she hit the trunk, and turned around to fist-fight with the drunk who’d just made a nasty reference to our color difference.

Sometimes the slurs were racial, sometimes homophobic. Often both. Blacks and whites seemed to hate us equally. Slurs happened in Harlem, in the East Village, near Lincoln Center, in the Bronx. I have a theory that we emitted a kind of light in those days and that it was simply unavoidable that certain people would want to put it out.

For example: Mars had just had her first orgasm with another human being, me—an incredible letting go for a butch from Brooklyn. We didn’t know what the crashing at the barred bedroom window was at first (it turned out to be chunks of concrete), but it was frighteningly loud and went on for fifteen minutes while I held my lover and she simply and quietly and, extremely uncharacteristically, wept.