

For Eve Ensler: *I am an Emotional Creature*

FOREWORD

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Having broken a rather astonishing silence by encouraging women to say “vagina” in public, Eve Ensler has now written a new set of monologues, intended this time for girls. “Dear Emotional Creature,” she begins in an introduction that is at once a *cri de coeur* and a call to action. As a woman, she knows the pressures on girls to silence themselves, to act as if they have no feelings or their feelings do not matter, to please everyone except themselves. The simple statement, “I am an emotional creature,” becomes a challenge to the myriad ways in which girls are looked at but not seen, talked about but not listened to, used, discarded, violated, exploited, maimed, and at the extreme killed. Like a woman claiming her body, a girl claiming her emotions breaks a silence and unleashes a vast resource of clean energy, an energy that can inspire all of us to transform and heal the world.

In addition to the girl facts recorded in this book, there is another series of facts worth considering: throughout the years of childhood, girls are more robust or psychologically resilient than boys, less depressed, less likely to suffer from learning and speech disorders, less likely to harm themselves and other people. The initiation of young boys into a masculinity that requires them to cover their emotional natures, to sacrifice love for the sake of honor and wed themselves to a false story about themselves has its parallel in the initiation of girls at adolescence into the division between good and bad women, the worshipped and the despised. As an

honest voice comes to sound or seem stupid or crazy, as girls are pressed to internalize a misogyny built into the very structure of patriarchy where being a man means not being a woman and also being on top, a resistance wells up inside them, grounded in their human nature. Like the healthy body, the healthy psyche resists disease, and girls being older at the time of their initiation are for this reason more lie-resistant. Hence the power of girls' voices to expose and by exposing disrupt what otherwise goes on for the most part in silence.

I remember the day I went to the Boston Fine Arts Museum with a group of eleven and twelve-year-old girls. We were spending a week together, doing writing and theater exercises as part of a project designed to strengthen girls' healthy resistance and courage. In the coatroom of the museum, as the girls shed backpacks and raincoats, I said we were going to be investigative reporters: our assignment was to discover how women appear in this museum. "Naked," Emma said, without hesitation. A current of recognition ran silently, swiftly through the group. Later when asked to write a conversation with one of the women in the museum, Emma chose a headless, armless Greek statue, weaving into the conventions of polite conversation her two burning questions: "Are you cold?" and "Do you want some clothes?" The statue's response, "I have no money," leads Emma to say that she knows a place where they give away clothes, "It's right around the corner." At which point, Emma and the statue leave the museum.

The monologues in this book are scripts for girls' resistance. Traveling around the world on behalf of V-Day, the project she founded to end violence against

women and girls, Eve was drawn repeatedly to the teenage girls she met along the way. Captivated by an electric energy that was in danger of being hijacked, she turned her writer's eye and ear to conserving this energy by transforming it into pieces for girls to perform. Wise, funny, irreverent, shocking, they give voice to what girls know. We hear a girl's pleasure in wearing a short skirt and feeling the wind against her legs, a girl's fear of being fat or hungry, her terror in finding herself sold into sex slavery, her desire to escape from those who in one way or another, whether with the best or worst of intentions, would deny or override her emotional nature.

The ten years I spent listening to girls, charting their development, going with them to beaches and museums, writing and doing theater work together, had the cast of revelation. Passages from my journal recording pleasures unearthed and losses covered over bring back the visceral sensations of that time:

This morning in the shower, I remember what it was like on Monday, that intense experience of pleasure, seeing the girls at the beach--- their bodies, their freedom. Minnow-like bodies darting in and out of the water. Running on the sand. Dancing, turning. I began to remember an eleven-year-old body---I began to remember my eleven-year-old body and to enter that body. Without thinking I began running, unencumbered, fast like the wind.

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Covering loss with words. Embroidering beauty over the ragged hole of loss. An inner sadness and a sign: do not touch. I am touched so directly, so immediately by these girls....I begin to move directly in their presence, to speak without hesitation, to find a freedom and pleasure that I relish...To leave this is to face the sadness of its loss.....

The research with girls was taking me back into what had been a lost time, a moment of freedom before womanhood set in. The sound of girls' voices, at once familiar and surprising, brought home the extent to which I and other women have rewritten our histories to conform to a story I now recognized as untrue. Like Anne Frank rewriting her diary, I had muted my pleasure with my mother. Like thirteen-year-old Tracy, I had come to hear an honest voice as "stupid." Like sixteen-year-old Iris, I feared that "if I were to say what I was feeling and thinking, no one would want to be with me, my voice would be too loud." Like Iris, I knew that "you have to have relationships," while at the same time knowing that relationships maintained by silencing myself were not relationships in any meaningful sense.

I am an Emotional Creature is written for girls. As Eve says, it is "a call to question rather than to please." It is also a call to all of us to join girls' resistance to turning their backs on one another and themselves. The opposite of patriarchy is democracy, rooted in voice rather than in violence and honed through relationship. Whether read in silence or performed on a stage, these monologues carry the hope of recalling us to our better selves. They remind us of a vast store of energy in our midst that doesn't cost anything and does not pollute, a source of power just waiting

to be set free. To understand the forces marshaled against its release is to recognize the extent to which we are held captive to a false story about ourselves, a story about manhood and womanhood that belies the fact that as humans, we are all emotional creatures.