



Women Love Sex

Edited by Susan Johnson

# Woman with a Wing

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ABELIA WHITTLE REMEMBERS THAT HER FATHER used to make her squat down next to the road when she needed to pee. She could never last the distance to the city, her bladder would fill up the minute she got into the car. She remembers squatting in a pink dress and a yellow cardigan, her fat thighs trembling as she strained. She remembers people leaning out of their car windows to laugh, the wind from the

cars blowing her red hair all over the place. She remembers that one time the wind pushed her off balance and warm pee drenched her panties.

Abbey always knew that she was a fat girl with a silly thin sort of name.

The boys at school danced around her on their skinny legs. Like mozzies, Abbey thought, as she tried to sail past. They ducked and danced, holding their noses. 'Whittle-Spittle stinks,' they shouted. 'She's a doughnut on legs.' They dabbed their fingers through imaginary holes.

One day Abbey'll meet a big bloke, her mother always said. Her father always snorted.

Once Abbey fell in love with a man on the train. Tall and plump, he had a black goatie that wagged with his chin. He was reading the newspaper. He spent such a long time studying the form guide that she felt a twinge of concern. It was all right now and then, betting. She was sitting in the opposite seat. When he got off at Katoomba, she didn't hesitate. In a dream, she followed him down Katoomba Street and almost at the bottom he suddenly turned and looked right at her. And then a small, dark-haired woman sailed past Abbey's shoulder and he smiled. They walked off together, not touching, but dying to. Anyone else would have seen it coming a mile off, Abbey thought. She had

## Woman with a Wing

to wait half an hour for another train to the city. When her friend Edith got on at Springwood, Abbey wanted to tell her but she thought she'd probably made enough of a fool of herself for one day.

She was forty-two when she met Ernie Bilson. He was painting a sign for the local school. Abbey went in every Monday morning to help out in the library. It was mainly girls in the library; the boys still made her feel a bit nervous. Ernie hardly came up to her shoulder.

'You've got to have a feel for it, sign-painting,' Ernie said.

He tried to explain. 'I never know what I'm going to do until I start. I feel funny. Here,' he thumped his stomach. Only he didn't have one to speak of. She could strum his ribs, she could tap his belly like a keg.

'It's like this,' Ernie explained once they were lovers. His hand darted between her legs and stroked so slowly, so long and slowly that her toes curled. 'See?' Ernie grinned.

Sometimes she wondered how Ernie could paint so finely. How he could get all that smallness into his fingers. He had big hands. She knew what people said, but she didn't know if he had a big cock; she'd never seen anyone else's. She thought his was all right. Better than all right, she reckoned.

'I've always liked this neck of the woods,' Ernie said, when he moved in. 'We used to come up here when I was a kid.'

With the Brothers and Sisters of Christian Temperance. Ernie had told her a lot about them. He still wasn't much of a drinker.

'We used to drive up in a big van, singing hymns. We used to park down at Echo Point and all pile out and have a picnic. It was grouse.'

He bought her a present for her birthday, a green silk dress. 'I look like a parrot,' she screeched. She was astonished at what she saw in the mirror. 'Everyone'll look at me.' 'Too right,' Ernie said. 'You look like the crown jewels, everyone'll want to pinch you. Come here,' he coaxed. 'Come, come, come ...' he twittered like a bird. Sitting in her lap, his silky tongue went right down her throat.

Ernie stayed for six months and then he shot through early one morning. She'd always known he would but she missed him anyway. The way he laughed, his blue van parked out in her drive.

He'd left some old canvasses in the chook-house. She had trouble getting the big one through the back door. She leaned it up against the window. It was huge and empty. Taking the train to Katoomba the next morning, she bought some

## Woman with a Wing

paints. As soon as she got home she started. The paint got blotched with tears. Trickling down the fat woman's arm, they turned it into a wing. A parrot flew past the window, and Abbey swirled parrot-red paint all along the woman's wing. She painted a house green as a tree-fern, and a van bluer than a satin bowerbird, and she flicked silver-white words over everything. And right in the middle, tucked under the woman's wing, she put Ernie. She painted him black as a cockie, with a yellow comb round his head. She stopped when she'd finished him, remembering the big black cockie that had tossed a pine cone down from a fir tree the year before. She'd been hanging out washing when it had landed on her head. It had stunned her; it had landed like a grenade. She'd had a bump on her head for a week, but she'd had to laugh every time she thought about it. It hadn't meant to, she knew, that's what cockies did.