



Apples and Oranges: A Woman's Journey to Sexual Identity

Jan Clausen

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After more than a decade of "marriage" to a woman with whom she was raising a daughter, Jan Clausen fell in love with a man, stunning herself and the lesbian community to which she had been intimately connected. The experience was, she writes, "like deliberately embarking on a sea cruise off the edge of a flat Earth." In her luminous and affecting memoir, Clausen charts the trajectory of her sexual life -- from her first kiss to her later loves -- and offers a stunning critique of society's insistence on yoking identity to desire. In the 1950s Pacific Northwest, Clausen grew up in a family in which extramarital sex, swearing, and spicy foods were verboten. In the sixties, she embraced the (hetero)sexual revolution, consorting with various adolescent Lotharios and failing miserably in her effort to become a topless dancer during her summer break from Reed College. After leaving school, she joined an experimental community, where she met her first woman lover. But it was amid New York's dynamic feminist milieu in the 1970s that she "crossed the pass of love" and fell for Leslie Kaplow, also a writer and activist. As a couple, they immersed themselves in the city's vibrant literary sisterhood and eventually launched their own literary magazine. In time, however, Clausen grew restless in her personal relationship and uneasy with what she calls *People in Groups*, those enforcers of ideological purity. Through her travels, she discovered sweet escape from her familiar world, especially through her activism in Nicaragua, whose war-ravaged streets would provide the backdrop for her unpardonable act: falling in love with a West Indian male lawyer. Deeply felt, gorgeously written, *Apples and Oranges* is a testament to the powers and perils of desire. It is also the story of one woman's mourning for the community that cast her out and a dazzling examination of the ways in which we all search for identity. Rejecting all efforts at sexual sorting, including the label "bisexual," for her own journey, Clausen arrives at an understanding of sexual attraction in which both likeness and difference emerge as deeply erotic. Whatever our passions, this groundbreaking work will never again let us consider the received categories of sexuality in the same light.

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