

“Portia”

from *Soliloquies: the lady doth indeed protest*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); chriswind3@gmail.com

Portia

If I'm the one with the property  
You'd think I'd be the buyer  
Not the bought;  
A lot of faith my father has in me:  
He distrusts my ability to judge, to discriminate—  
A decision made by chance,  
A decision inevitably and ultimately irrational,  
Is preferable to a decision made by me.  
    But no, you say,  
The decision was not to be by chance  
But choice, and thus reveal the suitor's character—  
That is, he who chose lead would be wise,  
To forsake appearance, and realize its irrelevance;  
True, but you forget the inscription:  
To choose lead, to choose 'to give and hazard all'  
Is to my mind *not* wise,  
For its foolish risk (all!);  
Is it not better to choose silver,  
And 'get what one deserves'?  
It seems to me a mature perspective;  
So, to judge by appearance  
(And thus forsake appearance)  
Or to judge by words  
—That is the choice.  
Words have meaning,  
And unless the words be false or deceiving,  
Is it not better to judge according to content,  
Than to judge according to form  
To substance, rather than pretence?  
So if it was to be a test of character,  
'Twas thus a poor test,  
For who was to guess what my father intended:  
The form did contradict the content;  
And so choice becomes chance, after all.

That *I* am not allowed to choose  
Is in principle, intolerable,  
But in practice, just as well—  
For there is really not a one worth choosing:  
A prince who boasts of his precious Porsche

And can fix it himself;  
The County Palatine, who believes  
A real man never smiles;  
Falconbridge, a pin-up boy  
With a mind as two-dimensional;  
A Scottish Lord interested in nothing  
But a good fight;  
An alcoholic (the duke's nephew, yes);  
The Prince of Morocco, a blood-thirsty Rambo;  
And Bassanio, attracted by wealth and beauty,  
Willing in a moment to sacrifice his wife for his friend.  
There is not one.

If I so despise men,  
Why did I disguise as one?  
'Twas not my choice:  
Shakespeare (a man) created my costume  
(And that of Viola and Rosalind),  
And in his cowardice, he refused to challenge the reality  
That to be able to interact  
Without having to defend against  
Sexual or romantic intentions,  
One must be male;  
That to be taken seriously,  
And to be exempt from compliments that essentially trivialize  
One must be male;  
That to be effective at an endeavour  
Of the intellectual arts,  
One must be male;  
That to be dominant, influential, powerful,  
One must be male  
In patterns of appearance, behaviour, speech, and thought  
—Patterns of thought?  
But didn't I put forward  
The feminine concept of mercy over justice?  
Didn't care and compassion win over fairness?  
No, look again:  
The Duke first pleaded for mercy, not I;  
My case was won on a technicality,  
On the letter of the law.

(Though it is worth mention  
That recourse to such a legal loophole  
Was my last resort.)

The masculist mode won out;  
But this is not surprising in a masculist court.

Where there is no challenge,  
There can be no change.  
For when the disguise is finally revealed  
It is not recognized  
That to be what I was (what I am)  
    One can be female—  
It is recognized only that I *am* female.  
And their response concerns only themselves—  
Relief, that they won't be cuckolds.

“Juliet”

from *Soliloquies: the lady doth indeed protest*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); chriswind3@gmail.com

Juliet

Romeo, Romeo,  
Where the hell art thou?

Have you stopped along the way  
To play at your stupid battle games?

Or have you changed your mind,  
And decided not to come  
Thinking me too 'easy' and thus insincere:  
What perversion of thought is this?  
Because I say what it is I want,  
Direct and forthright,  
You judge my desire false?  
While the one who dallies,  
Says no to mean yes,  
You deem true and take her  
Seriously?  
Or perhaps you think to be 'easy' is to be unchaste:  
If so, you misjudge  
Yourself!  
Because I want you (I want you)  
Does in no way mean  
I am a woman who wants every man.  
Do you think of yourself so poorly?  
Can you not accept that it is you who—  
That one look of yours makes me wet  
One touch sends a fire through every nerve  
That it is you, standing there  
In your tights so tight  
And your shirt  
Carelessly open,  
Your chest—

Oh Romeo, Romeo,



Then lick me love,  
Seek my treasure with your teasing tongue  
Nibble the pearl in folds of oyster,

My hands tearing at your head,  
'Till I am gasping in wild heat,  
Come, now, thrust your hard desire  
Reach deep in to me love—  
Let me feel your panting breath—  
Come night, loving black-silked night,  
Come take me, wake me,  
Make me cry out  
For more!  
Come, Romeo, come  
Come,  
Oh,  
Come!

Nurse laughs to see me so—  
(Though mother would faint,  
Still confusing innocence with ignorance)  
Young love, she mutters, fanning my face;  
But I protest, 'tis not love,  
Not of ones so young,  
Nor of ones just met—  
Let us be clear:  
Yours was an artful come-on  
(‘Let lips do what hands do’)  
For a classic pick-up—  
'Tis young lust, I tell her true:  
I want sex  
With a desire pure as the lace on my bodice;  
She clucks to hear me talk so,  
And I would persist—  
But what's in a name?  
That which we call making love  
By any other name  
Feels as good.

“I am Eve”

from *Thus Saith Eve*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); chriswind3@gmail.com

I am Eve. The bad girl, the evil woman.

I stand accused, and sentenced. Without a trial. For life.

Because of my single action, millions of individuals have been born with ‘original sin’, have been guilty even before they acted, doomed before they started. I alone have been held responsible for this sad and pathetic fallen race. Therefore, let me begin by correcting this: if I were free not to fall in the first place, they were free not to fall after me; and if I were not free, then I can't be held responsible—for my fall or theirs.

Now, let us further examine the charges, let us correctly define that action.

I have been condemned for choosing knowledge over ignorance: the fruit I ate came from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In a society that praises pursuit of knowledge and honours men of wisdom, why have I been viewed with disfavour? Had Adam reached out first, would he have been so rebuked? Or is the state of ignorance requisite for women only? (Histories pass *on* Socrates, they pass *over* Aspasia.)

In the same vein, I chose experience over innocence. In a context of attitudes that value experience, the disapproval of my action can only imply the desire that women, like children, live in a state of innocence.

I have also been condemned for disobedience. If that were the issue, then why wasn't the tree so named—‘the tree of obedience and disobedience’ or ‘the tree of temptation’. By naming it what it was not, God either deliberately tempted me or deliberately deceived me. And *he* should be judged, not I.

Perhaps though, the tree really was a tree of knowledge. In that case, one should wonder what insecurities led God to prefer obedience over knowledge. Indeed, one

should wonder why he went so far as to forbid knowledge. The reason is evident in Genesis (3:22-23): he didn't want us to equal him. He sent us out of Eden to prevent our eating from the tree of life, because already we were as wise for having eaten from the tree of knowledge, and if we had made it to the tree of life before he found us, we would've been immortal as well—we would've been as godly.

And that takes me onward, for counted among my sins is that of pride. Considering that later, through his son, God commands us to 'follow in his footsteps', I find the label of pride odd for the action that would do just that—make me like God. Furthermore, I find it odd to be condemned for being *like* God when, after all, he created us *in his image* (Gen 1:26-27). And God certainly is proud: to create us in his image can be called narcissistic, and to prefer us to spend our time admiring him rather than learning about him is equally evidence of pride. (As an aside, I would think that my knowledge would increase my admiration; that wasn't why I ate the fruit, but if it was, would it have mattered? Did God ever ask my intent?)

I have also been charged with a lack of faith. Yet I took it *on faith* in the first place that God told us not to eat from the tree: remember, he gave the command to Adam before I even existed (Gen 2:16-17). Further, I had faith in the serpent, I trusted the serpent to be telling the truth. Is it dishonourable to trust?

And is it reprehensible to act on that trust, as I did then in offering the fruit to another, to Adam? God commanded innocence, then held me responsible for an act of innocent intent. For how could I know my faith was misplaced? How could I *know* the serpent was evil until I had *knowledge* of good and evil? By telling us not to eat of the tree, he insisted on ignorance—but then held us responsible, for an act of ignorance.

Lastly, I have been condemned for using my reason, for it is through the exercise of reason that I decided to eat the fruit. The serpent's explanation of God's motives, that the knowledge of good and evil would make us godly and he didn't want us to equal him (Gen 3:5), seemed very reasonable to me. God's command on the other hand, not even to

touch the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because then I'd die, seemed so very *unreasonable*. Where is the fault in using that faculty given to me by God? The fault is not mine, but God's: he made reason guide our will and left our reason prey to deceit.

Or did he? History has it that the serpent's words were false, that I *was* deceived. But God's words after the fact (Gen 3:22 "Behold, the man is become as one of us") verify the serpent's prediction (Gen 3:5 "Ye shall be as gods"): the serpent was telling the truth. And so I stand condemned, for listening to truth. And for offering that truth to others.

“I am Noah’s Wife”

from *Thus Saith Eve*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); [chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)

I am Noah’s Wife

That’s it. Jus’ Noah’s wife. Mrs. Noah. A no-name person. My sons have names. Shem, Ham, Japheth. And my grandsons have names. Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, Canaan, Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram. But me I don’ have a name. I’m jus’–Noah's wife.

That’s why I’m here. To set the record straight. See everybody’s got me pegged as mean an’ a hen-pecker somethin’ fierce. Especially hilarious is the time where I refused to get on the ark. Well lemme tell you, that weren’t a bit funny. There’s a few things you don’ know about all that. Why d’ya think Noah wanted me so bad on the ark? Love? Pah. Now that’s funny. That man never loved me.

No siree, he wanted me on the ark because I was the one gonna look after all them animals. I was the one gonna clean their shit, feed their mouths, tend their litters, nurse their sick. What did ya think, Noah was goin’ to? No, he was gonna be too busy navigatin’, I can tell you that. Noah was gonna stand there like he always has, givin’ orders and tellin’ us they came from God. So that means I was suppose to look after him too. (My sons? Well, they each had a wife. Yup, there was Shem’s wife, Ham’s wife, and Japheth’s wife.)

An’ I was suppose to look after the ark–jus’ you think about keepin’ that thing clean and healthy: 300 cubits by 50 cubits by 30 cubits–that’s long as a football field and three stories high! (An’ only one window–lord, what a stench!) See he figured me to be game warden, housekeeper, and cook (an’ we ain’t jus’ talkin’ a week, we’re talkin’ close on two months)–an’ all the while me in a state of constant pregnancy. No thanks.

An' that's just what I woulda got--no thanks, no pay, no credit. If the flood destroyed the world an' all its people, where d'ya think alla you came from? Me! An' I ain't even given a name. To read *The Bible* you'd think he begat alla you hisself. An' you'd think he begat only sons. Well it ain't so.

An' if that ain't enough, when it was all over, God made his covenant *with the men*. Oh I knew he would. 'Course he includes me, I suppose, if us women come in under "the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you". Flatterin', hunh.

“Cinderella”

from *Snow White Gets Her Say*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); [chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)

Poor little Cinderella! Who more deserving of finding her prince and turning into a princess! Yeah, right.

First off, Cinderella did *not* have to do all the hardest work in the house. Our stepfather was a man of rank, remember, and my mother no peasant; we had fine rooms and beautiful clothes, and status enough to be invited to the King’s ball. So we certainly had maids and servants to scrub the floors and wash the dishes. Cinderella *offered* to help with the work. Probably because she had nothing else to do; she didn’t seem interested in much besides pleasing people. Drove me crazy.

And she did *not* have to sleep “in a straw bed in a poor room at the top of the house”. Think her father would put up with that? Certainly not. She had a perfectly good bedroom just like the rest of us.

The story goes that my sister and I were proud. True enough. What’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with being proud of what you can do, of what you’ve worked hard to learn well? All those gorgeous clothes people kept talking about were of my sister’s making—she was into fashion design. And as for me, well, it was known I could ride a horse to win most competitions in the land. So sure we were proud. But vain? Yes, we spent a lot of time in front of that full-length mirror: my sister had to see the effect of her creations (and so I suppose she’s as vain as one gets in that line of work), and as a favour, especially on days too wet or too cold for the horses to be out, I often modeled her half-finished pieces for her. But that’s it. I wasn’t even good-looking, by contemporary standards, no peaches and cream in my complexion!

And it’s true, Cinderella wasn’t invited to the ball. But only because the King

thought she was too young. And we certainly didn't snub her like you think. We called her into our rooms and asked her for advice on our clothes, to make her feel part of the excitement. She liked that, you know how younger sisters are, she wanted to iron this and mend that—we even let her do our hair.

But we *never* called her Cinder-wench, or actually, even, Cinderella. Her nickname was Kinderella (little child), and somehow the 'K' must have gotten changed to a 'C'.

As for what happened at the ball, that's true too. She was very beautiful, our new little stepsister, we never denied that. And when beauty and wealth come together, most people fall over themselves like asses. Those at the ball were no different: to them, appearance is everything. My sister was stunned by Cinderella's gown, and she gawked, it's true. But out of professional interest, not jealousy as most people think. I wasn't jealous either—I just wanted to ride one of those impressive silver stallions she came with.

And as for that bit about the yellow dress, the story goes that Cinderella asked my sister if she could borrow it to wear at the next ball, and my sister said no way. Well, I don't know, that might've happened, I wasn't there. That yellow dress is one of her favourites, one of the first dresses she made. But I think that if my sister *had* said no, she would've offered another instead. Then again, Cinderella's tone can be so sweet and self-effacing sometimes, I can imagine my sister saying no out of sheer irritation and leaving it at that.

The rest of the story is pretty much accurate. All three of us went to the second ball, Cinderella forgot about her curfew, lost her slipper on the way out, and—there is one thing I want to set straight: I did *not* try on the glass slipper. Quite apart from the fact that I didn't want to marry that prince (or any prince, or anyone at all, actually)—a glass slipper? You've got to be kidding, that'd be worse than wearing high heels! Not only would it make walking difficult, but with the obvious risk of broken glass, cutting, embedding, it would discourage movement altogether. No thank you!

(But as I said to Cinderella, if the shoe fits, wear it.)

(And we *all* will live happily ever after.)

“Greystrands”

from *Snow White Gets Her Say*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); chriswind3@gmail.com

Once upon a time I had pretty little golden locks. Now all I have are grey strands. And as I was walking along one day with my cart full of all of my things—if you didn’t take it with you, somebody would steal it—and I had a lot of things people would—well, they’d *kill* for my plastic bags, great big green ones with no tears at all, just a little one in the corner, still keeps you dry though don’t you worry, and I’ve got a big long stick with a nail stuck in the end, one of the city workers fell asleep on the bench next to me one afternoon, you know those old geezers ready to retire that they put on the Parks Sanitation Crew, well that stick sure is good at sticking things, I can’t reach down anymore, my back is falling apart, and you miss a lot of good stuff at the bottom of the bins if you can’t just reach down and grab it, well, see, now I just poke in my stick, a few times, ‘cause my eyes aren’t so good these days, and there, I’ve got it. But do you know what people most want to grab off me? My little black book. That’s why I keep it on my person, it’s too precious. I have a list, all written down of all the places that give away their leftovers—*good* leftovers—and I’ve got a star beside the ones that do it without making you feel like a beggar.

What was I saying? Oh yes, I was walking along, feeling right smart in my new rubber boots—yesterday’s find—a bit big but if I wear all my socks—and suddenly I smelled this delicious porridge. Now you have to understand that hot food is a real treat for most of us. How are we ever going to make ourselves a hot meal on the streets in our corners—plug in a hot plate to the nearest parking meter?

So I checked my list quick to see if this address was on it. (I forget easy, that’s why I’ve got them written down—it does no good to go the same place three times to ask when they said no the first time, they’ll think you’re being a pest. They don’t realize how

easy it is to just forget day to day where you've been. Why I hardly remember where I *am* sometimes). But no, these people weren't on the list, under the yes's or the no's. So I knocked on the door, politely, to ask if they could spare some of their nice hot porridge. No answer. Well, the door was open a bit, so I peeked in. No one there. But I saw the porridge steaming in bowls on the table. Brown sugar in a little dish even. Well I was hungry and so I confess I went straight to it. Serves me right, I burnt the whole roof of my mouth! Ooh, I yelled! Then I laughed! I haven't burnt my mouth since, well since I was a lot younger, but—eating pizza! Yes, that's it, the first slice from a box when it was just delivered... I tried the next bowl—too hot too, darn! But the smallest bowl was cool enough, so I ate it all without another thought. Then I felt awfully sleepy. Again when was the last time I ate so much I got tired? Well I headed for a comfy chair, but then I saw a bedroom—sure enough, there were beds! I mean—oh, this one is too hard—I knew they'd have beds, it's just I haven't slept—this one's too soft—in a bed—but this one is just right—since...

Delivered pizza! Can you believe I was once rich enough—can you believe I once had an address they could deliver it too? So what happened? How did I get from a little apartment on King and Third with flower pots on the balcony and a cat that knew its name and a cup of tea in the afternoons with “Cheers” reruns and Gus snoring in the lazyboy, his pipe fallen into his lap—Gus died. Gus who loved my golden locks, my prince charming for fifty-five years—died. So his pension stopped. And of course, as a homemaker for most of my life, and a part-time this and that, here and there, I had no pension of my own. The government—well, the government pension is based on how much you earned and how long you worked, so in my case it didn't come to much. The OAS and the GIS together came to about \$450 a month. Well, what do you think my rent was? \$400. That leaves \$50 a month for food and—and some of the pills I was on weren't covered, and there's extra billing every time I— Sure, we had savings, but that was running out. Of course I looked for a cheaper place to live, the shared accommo-

dition column had some pretty good possibilities, but no one wants to live with— There were a couple months I couldn't make rent— Boots got sick once and that cost, and I dropped my glasses and they broke and I had to buy another pair—I can't see at all without them—and I splurged, God knows why, and went to the dentist after all about that pain in my tooth, and, well I was evicted: I found myself out on the street with all of my things (what I had left—by this time it wasn't much, I had sold the radio, the tv of course, and my good set of dishes, things I didn't really need). And then I soon found out that if you have no fixed address, you get no fixed income. The OAS and GIS stopped. I woke up.

I mean these people came back into their house and found this smelly old lady asleep in one of their beds and they woke me up. As soon as I remembered where I was, I got all embarrassed. And then I felt the bed, oh my God, I didn't—I stumbled up, hoping they wouldn't notice, but they'd seen my cart and of course they'd called the hospital already. They apologized, I apologized, I tried just to be on my way, bundling up my big coat trying to hide the holes under the arms, thank you, I'm sorry, I—I couldn't get away, the attendants were there already— Is this a happy ending?

“The Ride”

from *Deare Sister*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); [chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)

The Tenth of July, 1042

from Coventry

Deare Sister–

Though it is not long since our last visit, I find once again great need to speak with you! (Would that you lived nearer to Coventry!) You remember the discussion we had upon my arrival, prompted by my journey through Mercia?

Fast upon my return, I spoke to Leofric about the absolute necessity–moral and economic–of lowering the taxes. I described to him all I had seen, as I described it to you: the bordars and cottars living in poverty on their little piece of land, in their thatched wooden huts without any comforts; their meagre clothing, that we are a country of wool producers and traders, boasting the finest weavers’ guild, and yet the people of the land are so poorly clothed; and their food, only vegetables, many can not even have meat for a Sunday feast (feast! they do not know the word), not even a piece of wheatbread.

And Leofric said well why do they not come and ask if they want their taxes lowered? If the tax is too high, they would say something–and they have not. But I said, the bondmen can not leave the farms; and the freemen too can hardly leave their work, and their families alone against the wild beasts of the forest. And even if they could, they have no way of getting here. And they can not send a letter, you know they can not read or write, so how are they to ‘come and ask’?

But he was deaf to my pleas. He likes being rich–he likes his meat and wheatbread, and his very fine mead, his furs, and his embroidered robes set with jewels. Leofric, I said, have you no charity? You speak of founding a Benedictene monastery,

are you not a Christian? Are you not bound by mercy, compassion, generosity—justice, for God’s sake, Leofric! You are the Lord of Coventry, the Earl of Mercia—you are responsible for these people! They are our kinsmen!

I swear sister, I would leave, but for the children. I can not think of them left to his ways, but if I were to take them with me—you know I would barely survive myself alone—with the children too, what could I do? I can not read or write well, women receive so little schooling, even in the monasteries. I am dependent on him, it is true: I am no different from the peasants I speak for.

Though some are. Do you remember Ethelfled? Seven years she gave Mercia good and conscientious governance, she built cities, she planned battles, and captured from the Danes, Derby, Leicester, and York. But it is true, she was regent and queen, not an earl’s wife. And an earl’s wife is not listened to. At least not in *this* court. I have heard that some consult their wives about public policy, but not Leofric—he simply will not or can not heed to reason.

Nor to emotion. I told him of the woman with seven children, you remember, three still little and another one on the way, and her husband lame from an attack by wolves, and her two brothers killed in the last battle, there have been so many lately—so she must work in the fields herself if her children are to be fed, she is almost dead with exhaustion, her neighbours try to help but they are overburdened themselves. I cried, I pleaded, Gawaina, I begged! But no. Leofric ordered me out of his room. I felt so—so weak!

So then I went to those who had strength. I know his advisors, I know which nobles he listens to. I spoke with them plainly and directly—but they paid no attention. (Except one—and you would be surprised which—he said he would speak to Leofric on condition—I refused of course!) Next I went to their wives. But those with influence did not want to risk losing it for mere peasants, and those without did not want to anger their husbands.

Gawaina, I had to do something! So I dressed like a proper little wench and snuck into the mead-hall one night. I thought if I could explain when they were drunk, maybe they would— But I am not as young and fair as I once was, and I was quickly discovered. Leofric was enraged! There he was, shining in his power, and glory, with two or three child-playthings (where do these women come from?), and suddenly his fat old wife is hoisted onto the table in front of him. I felt such shame! But I explained my presence, and asked him again to please lower the taxes. Well, all those merry red-faced drunkards thought it quite delightful—coarse rude brutes! When the laughter died, Leofric said with great solemnity, “I will.” Oh, Gawaina! I was so gladdened! But then he added “*If* you ride naked through the marketplace at noon.” Well again the hall broke into laughter and there was much toasting to that. To save what dignity I had left, I looked at my husband straight when the laughter stopped and said “I will.” In silence then, I clambered off the table (not a one would help—and they think themselves such gentlemen!) and I walked out.

When I got to my chamber, I full realized what I had said! Ride through the town naked! How could I? I am a God-fearing Christian, I can not show myself in public! Only a pagan whore could do that! But if the taxes would be lowered—I prayed to God—maybe I could...

But no, I could not. I know why he made that—that challenge: he does not like his fat old wife. Gawaina, I can not go naked through the town. He is right. With all the children I have had, since marriage at fifteen—though ‘tis to provide him with heirs!—I am indeed a frightful sight. It is good, these fashions, no one need know how ugly I have become. But he knows. And he wants to make a fool of me. And if I ride, he will. (Especially if he does not live to his word. It could be he was too drunk to even know what he said. And I will be twice the fool to take him seriously.)

As I was in my chamber, mother heard me weeping and praying, and she asked what was troubling me. Well, I told her, and she said the most wondrous thing. She said

‘Godgifu, your body *is* beautiful if you can use it in that way, to ease the burden of all of Mercia. To give the people a good life—to use your body for such a noble purpose is to *make* that body beautiful, my child.’ She then said, with a smile, that Leofric would never have the strength. The men, she said, they speak of courage and glory, but there is not a one among them who would not feel naked without his *armour*, can you think of him in public without his *clothes*? And God will *bless* your body, Godgifu, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And I saw she is right. She is very wise, our mother. (She offered to ride along with me, naked too!) I know he is trying to trick me, to force me to use my body as women have always had to, never to use their minds. But it is good to use my body in this way. In this way I use my body to serve my mind.

When I first decided to ride, I hoped no one would look. But now I have changed my mind. Sister, I hope everyone looks and sees this beautiful noble body! I may even put up my hair! A body is not ugly that has borne children, a body is not ugly that displays for justice—no matter how it looks!

So, deare sister, ask God’s forgiveness for me, wish me luck, and pray the brute lives to his word. Tomorrow, I ride!

Godiva

“The Portrait”

from *Deare Sister*, chris wind

[www.chriswind.net](http://www.chriswind.net); [chriswind3@gmail.com](mailto:chriswind3@gmail.com)

My dearest Nannerl, of course you have a right to be upset about the portrait. After all, you performed right alongside your brother; in fact, your father had the bills printed to read “Two World Wonders.” *Two*, not one. You were with Wolfgang on the 1762 tour through Passau and Linz to Munich and Vienna; I remember Count Zinzendorf called you (not Wolfgang) “a little master”. And you went again through Germany, in 1763, this time to Augsburg and Ludwigsburg as well as Munich, on to Paris, and then to London where the two of you performed that sonata for the Queen of England. And in 1765 you performed in Holland. No, do not doubt yourself, Nannerl: you were quite correct in calling Carmontelle’s portrait inaccurate because it shows Wolfgang at the keyboard, your father at the violin, and you merely holding the music for them. And he said *you* insulted *him*! I do know how you feel about the matter and I am completely on your side. Nevertheless, I must ask you to apologize.

And I know that your father’s recent decision to leave you at home and take only Wolfgang on this next tour doesn’t make it any easier. Though I admit to being glad not to be left at home by myself for once, I know it is terribly unfair. And I am writing this letter not to excuse or justify your father, but to explain. Nannerl, you are not to take his decision personally. It is not, as you first thought, that you are not good enough. Recall the Elector of Munich insisted on hearing *you* play the clavier, not Wolfgang; and there are many who share his high regard for your abilities. Nannerl, you are an excellent musician, a great performer. Nor is it that you have fallen out of favour with your father; he loves you as much as he ever did. (Which is, unfortunately, not as much as he loves Wolfgang. He is a man of his times. Didn’t you ever wonder why he started Wolfgang on lessons at a younger age than he started you? Surely you noticed he spent more time

with Wolfgang? And it wasn't until Wolfgang was ready to appear in public that he let you perform. You were young then, and perhaps did not notice... All the better. But I know Wolfgang had a headstart right from birth and—but enough, I am getting ahead of myself.) Nor is the reason for your father's decision, as you also suggested, that he considers you too frail to withstand life on the road. Wolfgang too came down with typhus in Holland.

Then *why*, you must be crying out! Let me try to explain. There is a time in every girl's life when, suddenly, people stop treating her as a person—and start treating her, instead, as a mere woman. All of the doors that until that time were open are suddenly shut. All except one. It happens to every one of us, some time between twelve and twenty. It is happening now to you. (And later, when that door has been passed through, it too will close, and there will be nothing left: nothing left open to go back to, and nothing open yet to go forward to. As soon as I gave birth to a boy, your father's attention rapidly shifted: I was of no more importance and Wolfgang was everything—but again I digress.)

This time of life is particularly difficult for someone like you, someone for whom the open doors promised such glory and richness. Why, when still a youth you were performing in all the great centers of Europe, you received excellent reviews and return engagements, you were meeting with all the important musicians of the day, you had a knowledge and experience of the outside world forbidden to others of your sex and age. And you were beautiful too, I know enough of the world to know this is an asset. Oh Nannerl, you had it all! Not even your brother had your beauty! But he had something more important: the right sex.

It's a betrayal, I know it. It dashes to the ground all of the things you thought mattered: ability, dedication, desire. I had a talent for singing. I found it hard too, when I realized that I was not destined to become a famous singer. But, alas, I loved your father and wanted a family, so I accepted that loss for another gain. But you, Nannerl, I suspect

it will be a long time before you marry, if at all, and perhaps you will not have any children. So it must be particularly frustrating and painful to have the only door you ever wanted open, suddenly closed.

I know this is little consolation, and indeed in a less generous heart, it would be salt to the wound, but remember, without you, Wolfgang would not be where he is today. You helped him become what he is. Much as your father likes to take all the credit for Wolfgang, it is simply not true. He had a family to support, a job to do, and while he was away playing in the consort, and directing the choir, it was you Wolfgang learned from. Remember in London, when Wolfgang was introduced to Johann Christoph Bach and the two of them, taking turns, with Wolfgang seated between Bach's legs, the two of them played a sonata together and afterwards improvised. What a delight that was to everyone! Of course I knew it was with you he learned how to do that. I remember you, as a mere girl of ten, taking your little brother, then six, and 'babysitting' him just like that. And there was so much more. All the musical games you made up, and the time you spent helping his little hand form the notes on the staff when he could not yet write the letters of the alphabet. When I saw how much more valuable it was to have you spend time with your music and with your brother, well, I did not force upon you all the domestic duties it is common for daughters to bear. Besides, how many women get to do the washing and cooking to the music of such artistic genius!

And all of that makes this last bit even harder to tell you. You suggested that I ask Carmontelle to re-do the portrait. That is an excellent idea, but it cannot be done. You see, the one you saw was already a second version, done at my insistence. Nannerl, in the first one, you were not there at all. The man had excluded you completely, left you out altogether. (And the portrait you see now is his idea of atonement.)