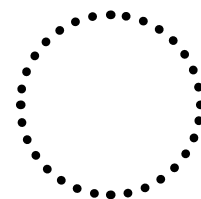


# Pulp

Sarah Rodigari



Rosa Press

First edition, 2020

/300

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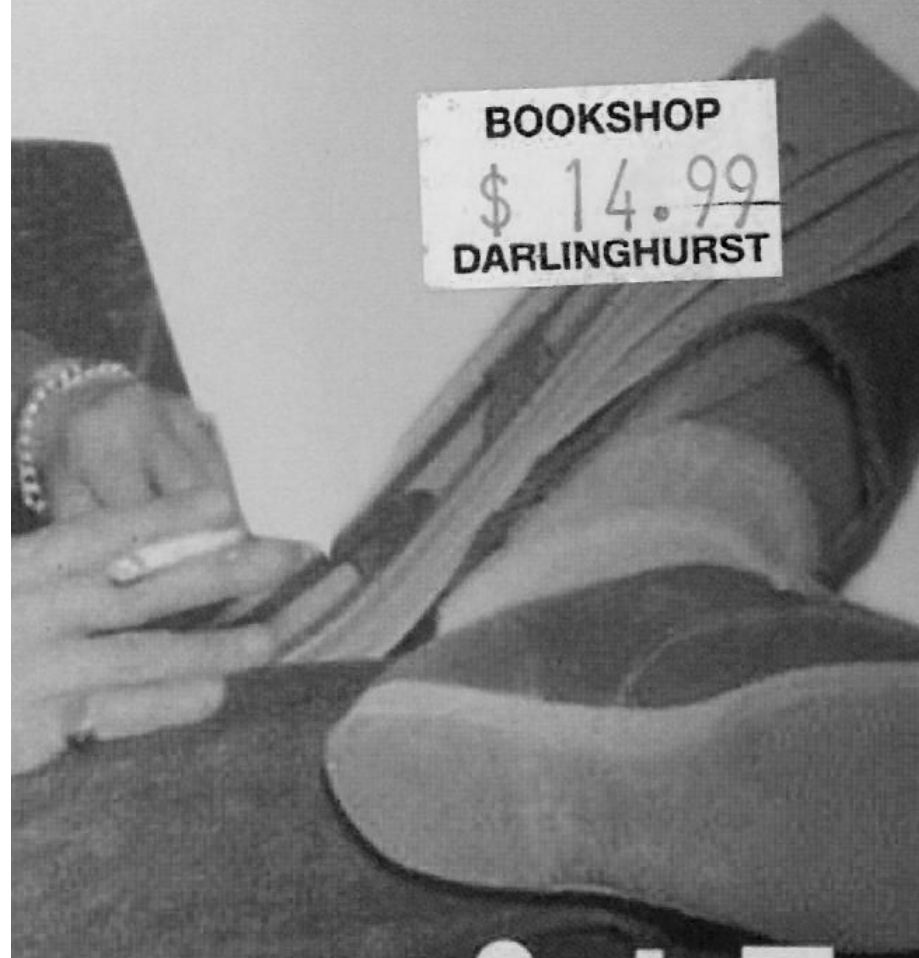
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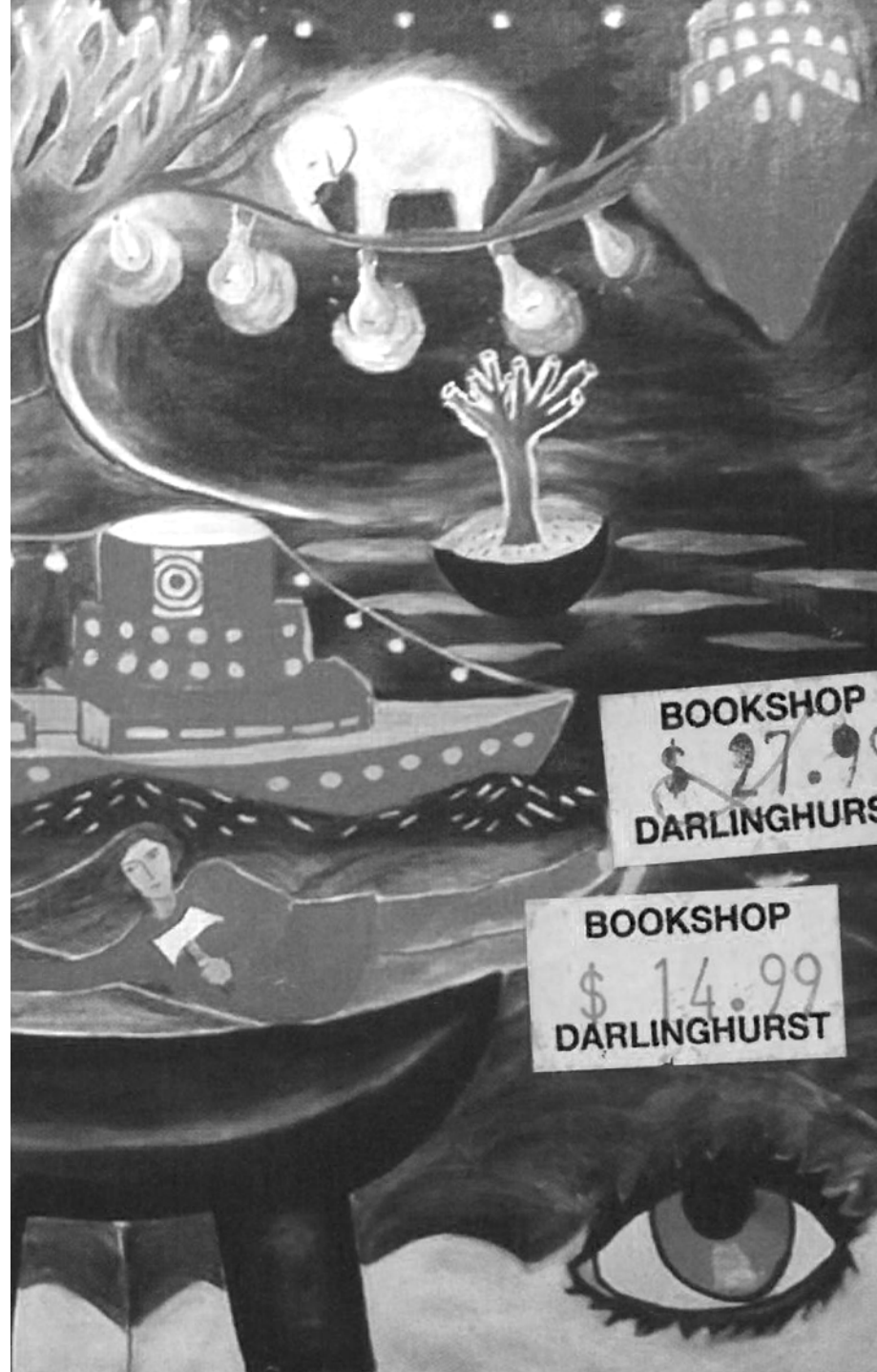
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## Jobs

I was having a drink in a little bar inside the Algonquin Hotel, with an editor named Dick Carroll, when he asked me, “What kind of story is a girl like you burning to tell”<sup>1</sup>

Who wanted a temporary job?

Most girls were supposed to want security. But Laura wasn’t like most girls. She was like damn few girls, in fact. She was a loner: strange dream-ridden, mildly neurotic, curiously interesting, like somebody who had a secret.<sup>2</sup>

There were class differences too — women seemed only to have jobs as waitresses or bartenders or truck drivers.<sup>3</sup>

I’m selling junk here in the Village,

She runs an elevator so she can wear pants all day. And Jack’s a draughtsman so he can be in an office full of virile engineers.<sup>4</sup>

young girls with no jobs and timid eyes; old girls with no jobs and telling eyes;<sup>5</sup>

To be a lesbian was to be invisible.<sup>6</sup>

Didn’t you ever work as busboy?

Dishwasher?

Ever been a masseuse?

A switchboard operator?<sup>7</sup>

She sat back, flushed, and stared at her handiwork.<sup>8</sup>

Sometimes I strip on stage but mostly I work the booths.<sup>9</sup>

she was quick and fluid in her movements,

and she had it down pat.<sup>10</sup>



## Bars

At night they hung out in bars where jealous fist fights frequently erupted; spurned by their families, they were subject to constant harassment and arrest.<sup>11</sup>

Chez Ivy in Bondi Junction  
the Purple Onion on Anzac Parade  
Doddy's on Darlinghurst Road and  
the Coffee Pot in Kings Cross  
the Trolley Car near Sydney University, the Sussex Hotel on  
Sussex Street in the city and the Park Inn opposite Centennial  
Park.<sup>12</sup>

L's was on a little side street in Greenwich Village, a dark, cozy  
lesbian bar.

A handsome, dark haired woman in a trench coat,  
drinking gin, stood at the bar, while around her there was the  
buzz that she was Claire Morgan!<sup>13</sup>

When a table became free, we sat down.  
Pat smoked Gauloises and drank neat gin.<sup>14</sup>

There was a girl at the bar, standing at one end, in black pants  
and a white shirt open at the collar.<sup>15</sup>

Laura glanced at her now and then. She had an interesting face

*It must  
be the drinks*, she thought, and refused another.<sup>16</sup>

I went to the bar myself, I hung out on the periphery  
and in the corners,

It took me hours to realise I'd come  
looking for the woman who lifted her beer in my direction.<sup>17</sup>

She was big, nearly six feet tall, wearing slacks  
and a man-cut jacket. She was a little over her best  
weight but strikingly handsome

She walked with a slight swagger, her hands thrust  
into the pockets of her pants, and Beth wasn't the only one  
who turned to look at her.<sup>18</sup>

a few minutes later they were being admitted to a  
basement bar with pink light, panelled with mirrors and filled  
with girls.

The place was called Colophon and it was decorated  
with the emblems of various famous publishing houses.<sup>19</sup>

## Books

To while away the hours, she read.

She read with passionate interest,  
and found a release she had not expected.  
Most were novels with tragic endings. Some were even dull,

Some of them depressed  
her.<sup>20</sup>

No one in  
these books resembled the kind of person I considered myself  
to be, ironic, intellectual, in a vaguely hip sort of way.<sup>21</sup>

They gave me the ridiculous notion of a future populated by  
slouchy, casually elegant, literary women.<sup>22</sup>

They belonged to another continent and time, for World War II  
seemed to have put an end to this aristocratic lesbian.<sup>23</sup>

Take away the closet in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*  
and there's no story.<sup>24</sup>

I told her that when I wrote my lesbian novel *Spring Fire*, it had  
to end unhappily.<sup>25</sup>

I said. "I'd like to write about boarding school."<sup>26</sup>

The novel's  
genre was neither murder nor suspense.<sup>27</sup>

Claire would  
quote that passage often, asking me what I thought of the  
mystery, what it was that Collette had found so incapable of  
expression.<sup>28</sup>

She had found the explanation for the word in a thick volume  
on the psychology shelf in the library.<sup>29</sup>

There was a pensive pause while Beebo tried to remember the  
books she's read about lesbian love.<sup>30</sup>

and a frayed copy  
of Proust.<sup>31</sup>

## Shorts

She was dressed in tight chinos and a boy's shirt.  
It was her favourite after work outfit.<sup>32</sup>

She wore leather, had her thumb hooked into her  
jeans  
pocket<sup>33</sup>

I didn't  
wear keys dangling from my belt for protection or pride and I  
didn't carry a Swiss Army Knife.

Short hair, jogging shoes,  
suspenders. But underneath I was wearing a silk camisole with  
frills at the top.<sup>34</sup>

Pat was wearing a white cotton jacket, a black turtleneck sweater,  
black men's pants (29W, 34L) and black loafers. The sweater  
was tucked in and her black leather belt featured a large silver  
belt buckle.<sup>35</sup>

When Laura turned to see her, she smiled, very slightly. Laura  
turned back to Jack. "Is that Beebo?" she asked. "In the black  
pants?"

Jack laughed at her. "You mean tan shorts?"<sup>36</sup>

She was wearing a pair of  
outsized, plaid-print men's pajamas.<sup>37</sup>

My shorts and her hand  
slid down together.<sup>38</sup>

Identifying with the underdog, the working class, we wore  
bowl haircuts, jeans, plaid shirts, and tan work boots.<sup>39</sup>

Bermuda shorts, and their shorter cousins, Jamaicas, were  
already making their appearance on the dyke-chic scene, the  
rules of which were every bit as cutthroat as the tyrannies of  
Seventh Avenue or Paris.<sup>40</sup>

## Calls

Neither of them heard the phone ring.<sup>41</sup>  
the shrill ringing of the blue phone by  
Venus's bed.<sup>42</sup>

"Come here, Laura." She looked unearthly  
as she spoke, with her black hair tumbled,  
her cheeks crimson.<sup>43</sup>

My ears felt like cauliflowers. I was straining  
so hard to catch the significance of every word.<sup>44</sup>

"I'll get the light, Leda" she said but Leda only looked at her  
and did not answer.<sup>45</sup>

The phone rang with a shattering clamour.<sup>46</sup>

I felt a wetness around my  
ankle. I grabbed at her, trying to regain my balance. Every time  
my buckle hit something it was like a bell ringing.<sup>47</sup>

"Guess who's gay?"  
And she began to call out names like a drill  
sergeant.<sup>48</sup>

They were — what did Jack  
call it? — gay.<sup>49</sup>

What did it mean to be gay? I had no idea, and my  
white Protestant, middle class background hung in shreds from  
my shoulders, leaving me without the least protection.<sup>50</sup>

But her feet took her there anyway, and she found herself ring-  
ing the bell.<sup>51</sup>

"All gay," she said, pausing for breath.<sup>52</sup>

## **Shops**

Manhattan in the early fifties;<sup>53</sup>

Shops, clubs, shoebox theatres.<sup>54</sup>

She would sit and gaze for hours at the girls in bars or passing in the streets.<sup>55</sup>

“Look at Beebo.  
She’s cruising you like mad.”<sup>56</sup>

They were stared at by regular customers, but Laura was afraid to stare back. When she did, once or twice, she couldn’t catch anyone’s eye.<sup>57</sup>

I stopped when I saw her, a woman in a business suit, her purse dangling from her shoulder by a thin, tasteful leather band.<sup>58</sup>

I’m always looking for it.  
“Do you look for it even in girls?” she said.  
“In anybody.”<sup>59</sup>

Laura always tried to find a solid middle-aged clerk, but the shops seemed to abound in sleek young ones.<sup>60</sup>

Pat had run out of Gauloises, and no place nearby sold French cigarettes.<sup>61</sup>

On her shopping trips she picked up books – every book she could find on the subject.<sup>62</sup>

She said, it had been inspired by a woman she waited on when she was working part-time in Macy’s.<sup>63</sup>

## Jerks

The door opened  
and the girl with the short dark hair and black pants came in.

Laura recognised her from the bar but was ignoring  
her royally.<sup>64</sup>

Beebo came to life with a swift jerking movement.<sup>65</sup>

“I don’t like you. I don’t like the way you dress or the way you  
talk or the way you wear your hair. I don’t like the things you say  
and the money you throw around.”<sup>66</sup>

Her finger penetrated me so hard and  
so effortlessly that for an instant she lifted me off my feet.<sup>67</sup>

She tried to jerk it away<sup>68</sup>

“Relax, honey. I’m just kidding.” She reached out for my arm  
again, and gave it a friendly tug.<sup>69</sup>

Leda’s gasp was one of pleasure and desire and it moved Mitch  
to more violence, pinning Leda’s wrist behind her back and  
jerking at her skirt.<sup>70</sup>

She turned away from me, flinging her hair from her  
face, and laughed, stroked my cheek once and walked out the  
bathroom stall.<sup>71</sup>

She sat like that for almost ten minutes until suddenly a strong  
hand gripped her neck and she put her head back with a jerk,  
electrified.<sup>72</sup>

They ask you who the hell do you  
think you are, going around in pants all the time.<sup>73</sup>

It’s not that she  
said anything, but she kept smoking cigarettes, pulling them  
from her squashed-in face with jerky little movements, then  
sucking them up again.<sup>74</sup>

Mitch pulled her slip over her head and jerked off her brassiere.<sup>75</sup>

She tilts her hips up, and starts jilling off.<sup>76</sup>

## Lights

Jack gave her the freshly lighted cigarette and she hid gratefully behind a smoke screen.<sup>77</sup>

Jan inhaled and let the smoke come out in tiny round clouds.<sup>78</sup>

Kitten reached for a cigarette and snapped the flame on her lighter.<sup>79</sup>

It tasted strong and sour and she squashed it in the ash tray and turned the light off again.<sup>80</sup>

Mitch gave her the cigarette and lit it for her with the small, blue-covered matchbox that said, "Clean-Rite-Cleaners" on the top, and "You get it dirty — we'll get it clean."<sup>81</sup>

The bartender brought her another drink while she searched for the last cigarette in her pack.<sup>82</sup>

The cigarettes in her hand were an excuse to look away for a minute and she did, lighting one while the general conversation died away like a weak breeze.<sup>83</sup>

The match she held was burning near her finger,

she turned to the girl beside her and held out the match. "Blow", she said simply, and the girl, with a smile, blew.<sup>84</sup>

Jack laughed silently behind his cigarette.<sup>85</sup>

Mona took a leisurely drag on her cigarette, letting her pleasure show in a faint smile.<sup>86</sup>

## Cover art

1. Design: Scott Idleman [Marijane Meaker, *Highsmith: A Romance of the 1950s*, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1999]
2. Design: Tee. A Corinne [Ann Bannon, *Beebo Brinker*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986]
3. Design: Tee. A Corinne [Ann Bannon, *Journey to a Woman*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986]
4. Design Tee. A Corinne [Ann Bannon, *Women in The Shadows*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986]
5. Design: Tee. A Corinne [Ann Bannon, *I Am a Woman*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986]
6. Image: Maureen, Brenda and their dog Geronimo, Wyee, early 1960s, photo by Zita Davis / courtesy the Australian Gay and Lesbian Archives [Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History*, Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2015]
7. Design: Tee. A Corinne [Ann Bannon, *Odd Girl Out*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986]
8. Photo: Maria Brannstorm [Barbara Hammer, *Hammer! Making Movies Out of Life and Sex*, New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010, 177]
9. Design: Scott Idleman [Best Lesbian Erotica 2000, ed Tristian Taormino, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1999]
10. Illustration: Nereyda Garcia-Ferraz [Archy Obejas, *We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?*, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2002]
11. Design: Scott Idleman [Vin Packer, *Spring Fire*, San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc. 2004]

## Endnotes

1. Vin Packer, *Spring Fire*, San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2004, v
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5. Ann Bannon, *Beebo Brinker*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986, 8
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17. Archy Obejas, 'The Cradleland', in *We came all the way from Cuba so you could dress like this?*, San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2002, 35
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43. Bannon, *I Am a Woman*, i
44. Hammer, *Hammer!*, 25
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60. Bannon, *Women in the Shadows*, 30
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64. Bannon, *I Am a Woman*, 39
65. Bannon, *Beebo Brinker*, 67
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67. Obejas, 'The Cradleland', 43
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73. Bannon, *Women in the Shadows*, 53
74. Obejas, 'Man oh Man', 75
75. Packer, *Spring Fire*, 38
76. Bruce, 'You Know What', 149
77. Ann Bannon, *Odd Girl Out*, Florida: Naid Press, 1986, 44
78. Packer, *Spring Fire*, 85



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