



**T H E A G E O F
W I R E
S T R I N G**

stories by

B e n M a r c u s

The Food Costumes of Montana

IN THE MORNING in Montana the leg was bound from the ankle to the knee with bacon or hair and then cross-gartered with thongs or strips of uncut rice; later a slack taffy, bound at the ankle, was worn. As the lower legs of the taffy became more fitted, they were called slews, and as the slews eroded or spoiled to the knee, fitted milk skins called loops were worn. By 11:30 a.m., feet were added to the loops. As slews grew shorter, loops became longer; by c. 12:20 p.m., the loops reached the hips and were attached by butter webs to the stomach. By c. 1:00, the loops and slews formed one garment; thus shads were first known. Beans and nuts were used, as was kale, and color became extravagant. The shads were multicolored and often each leg was clothed in a contrasting food style. As the upper part of the loops became more decorated and puffed out, a separation occurred (c. 2:30); the upper part became known as pike rings because of the swimming motion the food made as it circled the thigh, and the leg coverings were for the first time called bones and recognized as a separate accessory of dress. Knitted bones were first known in Oklahoma (3:27); in Montana, Linder is said to have

worn (c. 4:00) the first knitted vegetable bones for a record-setting period of three minutes before succumbing. Knitting thereafter became general, and machines came into use after autumn of that hour. Colored, cooked, and reversed pike rings were worn at 5:15, though cooled wheat sleeves were the fashion. Also at that hour the decorative bean boots of the army were of the northern or navy style, although oaten socks were shared by sisters during the 5:30 festival. Cereals came into use after 6:00. Noodles, because of their strength and elasticity, became the leading loop fiber after the Evening War. At 7:30, women began applying the fudge girdle, a one-piece garment that spread from waist to feet. As men's milk slews spoiled throughout the evening, their loops grew shorter and fresher, and the word *food* officially came into use just after sunset. Women's food, although hidden until midnight by their skirts, has always been an important part of their costume. It is expected to remain fresh for many days, and will certainly survive the women who wear it and the men who look at it.

TERMS

CHOKER POWDER Rocks and granules derived from the neck or shoulder of a member. If the mouth harness is tightened, the powder is issued in the saliva and comes to rim the teeth or coat the thong. For each member of a society, there exists a vial of powder. It is the pure form of this member, to be saved first. When the member is collapsing or rescinding, the powder may be retrieved by gripping the member's neck tightly and driving the knee into its throat.

EATING 1. Activity of archaic devotion in which objects such as the father's garment are placed inside the body and worshiped. 2. The act or technique of rescuing items from under the light and placing them within. Once inside the cavity, the item is permanently inscribed with the resolutions of that body and can therefore be considered an ally of the per-

son. 3. Dying. Since the first act of the body is to produce its own demise, eating can be considered an acceleration of this process. Morsels and small golden breads enter the mouth from without to enhance the motions and stillnesses, boost the tones and silences. These are items which bring forth instructions from the larger society to the place of darkness and unknowing: the sticky core, the area within, the bone. 4. Chewing or imbibing elements that have escaped from the member or person into various arenas and fields.

CLOTH-EATERS, THE First group actively to chew, consume, and otherwise quaff extensive bolts and stacks of cloth.

MOUTH HARNESS, THE 1. Device for trapping and containing the head. Mouths are often stuffed with *items*—the only objects legally defined as suspicious or worthy of silent paranoid regard. A claim is therefore made that we eat suspicion and become filled with it. The harness is designed to block all ingestion. Gervin states: "His mouth will be covered with a wire web. He shall never eat. Nor may he ever take what is outside and bring it inside. His stomach will forever devise upon what is within." 2. A system applied to the head to prevent destruction or collapse while reading or absorbing code.

SPEED-FASTING EXPERIMENTS Activity or practice of accelerated food abstention. It was first conducted in Buffalo. The record death by fasting occurred in two days, through motor-starving and exhaustion, verbal.

From: Ben Marcus. "Notable American Women."

Dates

1852

WOMEN IN MIDDLE DENVER seize celebration rights to the annual Festival of Stillness, previously observed and dominated by men. They travel in groups to mountainsides and forests outside of town, drink girls' water, attire themselves in stiff sheets of weighted cotton, and seek a final, frozen posture, hoping apparently that the mountain weather will fossilize their bodies into a "one true pose," to represent them for all time. Their bodies are displayed in a traveling exhibit called "Women's Behavior Statues," and teenage girls are asked to study and rehearse the more basic positions. The slogan "Action is harm" is coined that year and the Festival of Stillness becomes a dominant women's holiday."

1939

Long Island physician Valerie James, thirty-six, and a sister begin a practice devoted to what they call "Women's Fuel." She has studied anatomy with a local medical group for three years but is otherwise untrained. Before she develops her notorious line of medical drinks for women, the James Liquids, or Water for Girls (1955), she and her sister will attempt several techniques of altering the disposition of women: the water chair, bolted to the floor of a medicinal pool, which holds a woman underwater until her lungs give out and "expel from the body all toxicity"; a sleep sock slung over the doorway, that women might sleep "in the fashion that they stand"; high volumes of wind shot at a woman's body to "massage the senses"; and endurance speaking (or language fasting), in which the woman speaks rapidly until collapse, to "deeply fatigue the head and free it of language pollutants." Only the sleep sock, which enforces a female sleeping posture, will prove to have lasting credibility, although the language fast is adopted and modified by Sernier, who requires his students to undergo it before attending his lectures.

1966

A clear sock is devised by the body-sleeve specialist Ryman that will protect a woman's head from men's language, the so-called weapon of the mouth. The sock also works to block the entrance of television and radio transmissions, certain man-made aromas, and men's wind. Because breathing is difficult when wearing the Ryman sock, fainting often results, and it is through this accident that the Listening Group discovers what it will term the "revelatory power of willful fainting," and adopts the belief that regular drops in consciousness allow women to hear something deeply secret in the air. The Ryman sock will be fitted posthumously to the heads of dead Silentists, to aid their attainment of a possible women's afterlife.

1972

Martha Ferris develops Women's Sign Language and tours the country, demonstrating the technique at schools and churches, proposing a women's bilinguality that will not only allow for private utterances but possibly enable new forms of thought not available under current

systems of grammar and syntax. Her younger sister, Katherine Ferris-Watley, has pierced her own eardrums during a local show of silence and refuses to learn American Sign Language, keeping her hands swaddled in cloth, and often "signing in tongues," a form of gibberish sign language thought to have religious significance. It is from Katherine's blunt and frustrated semaphore that Sign Language for Large Hands emerges, a system of forceful prop-aided sign language meant to be read from a great distance, utilized by Silentists who have injured or burned their own hands in protest but who still must enact a basic language. "Women's Sign Language will be rejected by the deaf communities, since much of it requires that the hands of a woman be pinned against her hips while she jumps and spins in the air, actions that deaf women, with their compromised sense of balance, are unable to perform safely. The Listening Group, seeking further difference from the Silentists, will establish a new but troubled relationship with the deaf communities, believing that their skin is receiving the sound that their heads cannot, leading to the Deaf Pelt Thefts of 1974, an action of massive scalping and skin theft against deaf persons.

...

"I hereby admit that there is no such thing as an unoccupied zone, that wherever I go, I do damage to what was there, by either killing or displacing it, that my presence encourages something else's absence, that the term "my body" implies no one else's body, that by moving through air and time, I kill what was attempting to rest or habitate or hold steady. I remove that thing from its chosen space and effectively deny its reentry. I act as a warden of a prison in reverse, since wherever I am, no one else can be, so that to execute this agreement is to do a violence, for which I hereby admit my guilt. I admit that even by speaking or shouting or murmuring or babbling or humming, I crowd my personal airspace, and thus someone's potential personal airspace, with code and thus limit the insertion of codes by others, deny their entry, hoard the airways, create a blockade. For this and other crimes of motion, I hereby admit my guilt."

Sign Here:

Date: