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About the Cover—Black Hawk Greets Spring

Statuesque Chief Black Hawk (1767-1838) presides over the scenic Rock River Valley south of Rockford. Artist Colleen Milani of Rockford used a pen and ink stipple technique which culminates in the stony stare of the Sac warrior. Colleen is a junior in graphic design at the University of Illinois.



Hot Flash

It has started. The beginning of the stopping. Contradiction. Transition. They say it's like a transmission in a car that is stopping, shifting gears, transferring itself into another stage, a quieter stage. It's whispered: the change. My mother's friend whispered shush, "the change." A mysterious hushing united them when as a young girl I entered our kitchen where they gossiped, laughed, cried. Shush. I wondered about the hushing quiet of this secret thing my mother shared that happened to her friend. Now I know.

A drifting shift pulls at my hide, a tiny spark of heat pricks at me signaling a burner's lit. Then my bones spread the heat from the center where the ribs circle my middle. The burning radiates to my toes, my feet sweat inside my shoes. It shoots through my arms and up to the cranium, each hair sweats. Friction: I feel my bones and skin rub against each other, igniting.

This heat from within is oddly forced, panicked, artificial, itchy, random. When heat comes from outside the body, although synthetic, it seems more honest. One knows the source, a red-glowing ember, a lighted candle, a stove, a house burning. The fuel within me, the hormones that shift and prick and drip from my soul, leave me different, changed, hot-cold, sweating-shivering, transition-transmission, starting-stopping. Shush. Hush.

So what profound meaning does this give me? That once I could have babies and now I cannot, although that is not entirely true, but the odds rest on the barren side. So is this a big deal to me? No. Being able to bring new life into the world seemed normal and ordinary and extraordinary. Not having the odds-on-favorite eggs to match up with sperm seems normal and ordinary and extraordinary.

I've heard disparaging comments about mental constancy and rationality. My rationality is intact. I have no mood swings, no madness, no depressions, a few earned joys. I get peeved at the same things as before, machinery that breaks, men who steal my ideas, timid women. I get angry at the same things as before, like children dying. I'm happy when anyone thinks enough of me to tell me a joke or tease. The extent of my body's fire does not involve my personality, my sense of humor, does not scorch my brain.

My hot bones, my cooking hot bones are a metaphor for my altered body. I seek to know more about this phase I approach. I look to books to educate me, except I find few. Funny, isn't it? Every woman who has lived past child-bearing years has experienced this and shushed, hushed this secret; this conspiracy between friends, mothers-daughters.

We teach each other valuable minutia, like how to sing, how to bake an apple pie, how to make lace with a bobbin and a single thread, how to write a poem, drive a car. When we speak of the change, we loathe asking questions above a whisper because it becomes a public admission that our bones ignite like kerosene-soaked branches. Knowing what we face ranks as pivotal minutia in women's lives but we defend ourselves little while quietly perspiring within our silk blouses.

I am not the first to break the silence that nourished my mother's generation, but I feel unaccompanied into this place. I acknowledge that

although multitudes have gone before me, this is a solitary stepping off, a trek on a path that I travel alone. I pray to know what I'm in for; directions, a compass, a map. We dear friends, however, avoid the topic and if we speak at all, we make light of it. We say, shush, "what's there to talk about?"

Irvana K. Wilks (Mount Prospect, Illinois) is writing her first novel. She edits *Who Represents Me?*, a directory of elected and appointed officials in suburban Cook County.
