The Woman in the Photograph

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For Dad, who taught me about photography,
and that I can do anything

‘What makes photography a strange invention is that its primary raw materials are light and time.’

Understanding a Photograph, John Berger

24 April 2018

The Photographers' Gallery, Ramillies Street, London

Seeing the photograph will be a shock.

It always is. Even though she is the one who took it.

Veronica leans against the wall opposite the gallery entrance, braces herself, and turns her eyes to the poster. The no-nonsense font declares: 'Women in their Power: Veronica Moon and Second Wave Feminism: 26 April—26 August 2018'. Two days from now. Vee reads the words until they cease any sense they were making, and then she makes herself look at the image. Doing it here, publicly, with cyclists skimming through her field of vision and grimy London noise all around, makes her feel half-disappeared already.

The feelings have never changed, even if the memory is long gone. Love and loss and ache and sheer flaming rage at everything that was taken from her in the moment that she pressed the button that opened and closed the shutter faster than a final blink. Vee is top-full of it all, still, even after all of these years.

Leonie, the woman she loved as she has loved no one else in her seventy years, glowers from the frame. Her heavy brow, half-closed eyes, great arc of a nose, all suit being enlarged to poster size. Leonie always knew that she deserved more space than the world gave her. The black and white image looks contemporary after thirty years, as the novelty of colour and fuss in photography has come into fashion and gone again.

Veronica can, if she tries, admire this as a photograph. All of her craft is here: the way she managed the light, chose the angle, created a portrait that is both greater than Leonie and the very essence of her, distilled to an almost unbearable likeness. But there are good reasons why she avoids it. It was the moment of the two greatest losses of her life.

Even now, when she should be facing everything, resolving everything, when her eyes should be taking in all that they can before it's too late, she cannot bear to look at this image for long.

Whether Vee likes it or not, it's what she will be remembered for. Though if she had been a war photographer, she would have been congratulated. If she had been a man, come to that. Unflinching, they would have said. Bold. Uncompromising. Veronica, by virtue of being a woman: heartless, ambitious, unfeeling, selfish. Career over.

Part 1: Subject

First, forget all you think you know about the camera being a neutral object, a benign, unlying eye, watching and capturing everything without judging or deciding. That's what the world wants you to think.

In the hands of a true photographer, a camera can be clever, wily, sharp, cutting; it can be consoling, healing or divisive; it can be smart. It should definitely be smart. At least as smart as the person who is holding it. And if that person is a woman, she will know already how to pay attention, to watch the world around her for signs and clues to what she needs to be careful of.

Every time you press the shutter, you are making a choice about where to look, and what you are choosing to show, or to remember. You are creating a history.

Veronica Moon, *Women in Photographs* (unpublished)

'Postman at the Picket Line'
Veronica Moon

Exhibition Section: Early Days

Camera: Nikon F1
Film: Kodak, 200 ASA
First published: *This Month* magazine, 1968

Welcome to Veronica Moon's world: quietly subversive, women-centred, and not afraid to allow the viewer to deduce the story behind the image.

This photograph was taken at the picket line at the Ford Dagenham strike of 1968. Female machinists had walked out in protest at being paid less than their male counterparts for equivalent skilled work. Moon had just arrived at the site when the postman came to deliver the mail; in this photograph, she captures the moment when he decides not to cross the picket line and turns back, cheered by the striking machinists. Notice how the focus of the photograph is not the postal worker himself, who is caught leaving the shot, only his shoulder and bag visible. Rather, Moon draws the watcher's eye to the three women in the foreground of the photograph, the interplay between their bodies, arms linked, and the tilt of their heads as they laugh. The image is reminiscent of Land Girl publicity posters and seaside holiday snaps, and connects to our ideas of women as sisters, united and formidable.

The women here are strong, good-humoured and full of purpose; the camera's view is steady and honest. Behind the trio of faces the photograph focuses on, you'll see another group of women; the one on the far right is the second wave feminist and writer Leonie Barratt, a long-term associate and close personal friend of Moon.

This early photograph bears many of the trademarks of Moon's later work. The focus is sharp: as with her later portraits, there is no desire to hide flaws or soften images. The photographer draws our attention to the faces of her subjects by positioning them a third of the way down the frame. And there is nothing static or posed about this photograph. It is a moment captured that would otherwise have been lost.

This is the first of Moon's images to have been published in the UK national press, when it appeared to accompany a column by Leonie Barratt in *This Month* magazine, in July 1968. *This Month* was published from 1962 to 1986 and published a range of reviews, features and columns, with a readership of 250,000 at its peak. It could be seen as the first photograph of Moon's feminist career. Many of the photographs that Moon took previously while working at the *Colchester Echo* do feature women, but these are in traditional roles – at coffee mornings and charity events. Moon was assigned these jobs while her male colleagues were given news and sports stories to cover; she went to Dagenham on her day off, having been refused permission to attend as an official photograph by the *Echo*'s editor.

In 1968:

- Harold Wilson was Prime Minister of Great Britain
- In the USA, Senator Robert (Bobby) F Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated within three weeks of each other
- The Beatles had two number one chart singles in the UK with 'Lady Madonna' and 'Hey Jude'
- Enoch Powell made his notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech

- The TV show *Dad's Army* was first screened
- A demonstration in London's Grosvenor Square against US involvement in the Vietnam War ended in violence and mass arrests
- the Abortion Act 1967 came into effect, legalising abortion on a number of grounds
- Agatha Christie's novel *By the Pricking of My Thumbs* was published
- The film *Rosemary's Baby* was released
- The iconic photograph 'Earthrise' was taken when the Apollo 8 spacecraft orbited the moon

And the female machinists at the Ford Dagenham car plant went on strike because they believed their skilled work should be appropriately rewarded, and they should be paid at the same rate as men doing equivalent grade jobs. Veronica Moon went to take a look.

15 June 1968

'What are you sighing about now, Dad?' Veronica's father, Stanley, reads the *Daily Mirror* less for news and more as a starting point for discussion.

'I'm all for equal rights but this is going too far. Listen. "Thousands of car workers will be laid off next week unless 187 women sewing-machinists call off a strike for more pay."'

'You ain't really for equal rights, then, are you?' Vee has her kit spread out on the dining table, and she's checking and cleaning each part in turn: camera body, lenses, filters, strap, the case she carries it all in. When she presses the shutter and winds on, the sound always seems synchronised with the beat of her heart.

'I am. But it ain't an equal situation, now, is it, Veronica?' He leans forward in his armchair, crumpling the newspaper into his lap, and says, 'The women will only be working for pin money. The men who get laid off – they're the ones putting bread on the table. And their wives will have something to say if they come home with nothing.'

'I thought I might go down, later in the week. I've got my day off on Thursday.'

'Bob isn't sending you to cover it, then?'

'It's a bit out of our way, and anyway, Bob wouldn't send me. He'd send George. I just get the jobs George don't want.' A jumble sale to raise money for the Spastics' Society was the highlight of last week.

When Vee got a start as a junior photographer at the *Colchester Echo* she knew she was lucky, and she knew she would have to work her way up. (Not least because she suspected that her dad had probably twisted Bob's arm to get her the job in the first place. The two of them were at school together. Veronica hasn't asked if that swung it for her, because she really, really doesn't want to know.)

Stanley gets out of his chair. 'Well. That allotment ain't going to weed itself.'

'That's for sure,' Vee says.

'It's a nice day. But you'll be shutting yourself under the stairs, will you?'

Vee smiles. 'What else would I be doing?'

Stanley shakes his head. 'This will all have to change once you're married, you know, treasure. Barry won't want you sneaking round here every Saturday afternoon.'

'Barry doesn't mind, Dad. And anyway, the wedding won't be for a few years yet.'

'Your mother was only nineteen when we got married.' It's eleven years since she died, but the hollowness of loss is still great enough to make a short, hard moment for them both before they look at each other and sort of smile in acknowledgement that she is gone, they are not, and they are the only two people in the world who could ever understand, precisely, what that means.

'Will you bring some rhubarb? We can have it for afters, tomorrow.'

Stewed rhubarb and condensed milk is her dad's idea of heaven.

Stanley nods, takes his hat from the stand by the door, and he's gone.

Almost as soon as Vee had managed to get a camera of her own, when she was fifteen, thanks to savings and a birthday and Christmas present combined, she realised that she'd never be able to afford to have her films developed, so she set about learning how to do it herself. The novelty of her makeshift darkroom under the stairs, the sour/sharp smells and the eerie light, has yet to wear off.

Vee can still remember the first time she saw a photographer at work. It was at a cousin's wedding. Vee was a seven-year-old bridesmaid, in shell pink with a little white knitted cardigan, pink silk roses to hold, and borrowed satin shoes with scrunched-up handkerchiefs in the toes to make them fit. Every picture of her from that day shows her staring into the camera. She remembers how much she wanted to know what was happening under that cloth the photographer was hiding in. When she wasn't in the photographs she stood behind the tripod, listening to the clicks and winding sounds of the camera at work. When the photograph album was shown – cousin Betty had married up in the world, there was no one in the family who had had a proper album before – Veronica saw how the adults used the photos to relive the day. They commented on this hat and those flowers, what a shame it was about the weather and how handsome Betty's husband was. That man, under the cloth, with a button and a handle to wind, had quietly made the shape of their memories.

She didn't understand it in those terms at the time, of course. She just knew she wanted a camera like other children wanted a pogo-stick.

Now she and Barry are engaged, and he's keen for them to spend all of their spare time together, she still pleads for her Saturday afternoons. Once Dad started inviting him to the football, that got a bit easier. On match days, she can join them in

their local pub afterwards, commiserate or celebrate, head on to the pictures or to Barry's mum and dad's for tea. She finds it easier to be polite, to talk about *Z-Cars* and Harold Wilson, and other things she isn't much interested in, if she has spent a few hours in her cramped, impossible-to-stand-upright-in darkroom, lit by its red light bulb, watching her images develop as they float below the surface of a chemical bath. Feeling her soul's happiness as she does what she has wanted, above everything, to do since cousin Betty's wedding day.

20 June 1968

Veronica Moon has never been to a picket line before.

'Don't do anything I wouldn't do,' Dad said, as he waved her off this morning. He had checked the tyres on their shared Ford Anglia, as though the hour and a half from Colchester to Dagenham was some kind of epic journey. Still, it's probably the longest drive she has ever done on her own.

'Funny thing to do on your day off,' had been Barry's comment, but Barry's job isn't his hobby, so of course he wouldn't understand. Vee hates that he calls photography her 'hobby', but she can't think of a better word. It's her passion, really, but when she said that to him he laughed and said, no it wasn't, he was.

And now, here she is. Actually where the action is, for once.

The papers yesterday reported that Ford are losing more than a million pounds a day because of the strike. The Secretary of State is involved. All the way, in the car, Vee has been thinking about what she would find when she arrived. She thought she would be able to see the world changing, and that she could be the one to chronicle it. She's been drawn back, again and again, to Bill Eppridge's photograph of the dying Bobby Kennedy. She feels the shock of the event, of course she does: she's crowded round the papers, the television, with everyone else as the impact has been discussed, all over the world. But when she looks at the image of the man on the floor, the blood, the young man cradling his head, she feels something else, too. Or rather,

she imagines – imagines she was the one in the Ambassador Hotel in LA when the bullets were fired. Would she have had the presence of mind to take those photographs? She thinks so. She just needs to get herself to places where history is happening.

The picket-line women are in flat shoes and mini-dresses, arms bare to the sun, tiny and bright against the metal gates, the grimy brick of the factory building glowering over them. Vee wishes she hadn't dressed the way she always does for work. Her knee-length skirt is sticky with static against her stockings. Her jacket, so handy with the pockets for film cases and spare lenses, is weighing her down, and she can't take it off because she knows she has sweated through the blouse beneath it. She feels old-fashioned, out of touch. Why doesn't she have a mini-dress? Why is she sleeping in rollers? And why on earth are hair and clothes what she is thinking of now?

Maybe this is what the world changing looks like. It's not as dramatic as what happened in Grosvenor Square or the protests in Paris, but it could still be part of a change. As her dad says, nothing lasts forever.

She takes a closer look at the banners. They are painted or coloured in, made with careful attention to detail, letters equal height and the spacing of the wording considered. 'No Deal Till You Recognise Our Skill' reads one banner. 'Unequal Pay Is Sex Discrimination', reads another. 'We Want Sexual Equality' says a third. These women are organised and they mean what they say. Vee inhales and straightens her spine. This is change, all right. She needs to teach herself to see it.

Behind the banners, women chatter and laugh. Someone is handing round sandwiches. Well, there isn't really any reason why something like this shouldn't feel like a picnic. However serious it is.

She looks around, for a leader to introduce herself to. There's no one obviously in charge; but then she recognises one of the women from the press coverage.

'Hello,' Vee says, 'I'm Veronica Moon. I wonder if you'd mind if I took some photographs? Of the picket line?'

'Be our guest,' the woman says, 'it's nice of you to ask. The blokes don't. Where you from?'

Vee takes the lens cap off the Nikon F1 that she still can't believe is hers, although technically, it isn't, until she's finished paying Dad back for it, out of her wages. 'Colchester. The *Echo*. But I'm not here officially. It's my day off. I came just to see, really.'

The woman nods. 'There's been a few of those. Especially women. Do you get paid the same as the blokes?'

Vee thinks about George, who behaves as though she should be paying him for the privilege of working under him, and the male journalists who barely tolerate her, the secretaries who've done their best to make her feel welcome. She's a fish out of water, really. No, it's not that. She's a fish that the other fish refuse to make a space for. She would swim as fast, if she could. 'I don't think so,' she says.

'No surprises there,' says someone else, and Vee nods – she doesn't trust herself to speak, suddenly, feeling the enormity of what she is up against and, at the same time, the possibility that is offered here, for all women. She takes photographs of the gathered strikers, the banners; drops to her knee and changes to a wide-angle lens so that she can capture the size of the factory behind them, how it both dwarfs them and creates a dull background to their light and power.

What if this isn't as simple as another strike, interesting because it has women at its heart this time? What if what is happening here is – connected? Part of the same power in the world that means she has to be grateful for being 'a woman in a man's

world', that her married friends look down on her and talk about meals for their husbands as though housekeeping is a vocation? 'Women's lib' is an easy joke in Vee's world; she remembers Barry's dad laughing about it getting out of hand, when he did the washing up at Christmas. Barry's mum laughed back and said if that was the case she wouldn't bother washing her hair. But what if women's lib is more than men pulling their weight? What if it could be about genuine equality? What if Vee could be judged on her merit? What if no one cared whether she was a woman or a man and only cared about the work she did? The rhythm of her blood accelerates at the thought of it: she feels it in her temples and her wrists, at her throat. She nods her thanks to the women, stands, and takes a breath and she tells herself what she always tells herself when she feels overwhelmed or out of her depth: do your job, Veronica. Do your job and do your best.

She's changing back to a standard lens when she hears something behind her: a woman's voice raised in a catcall, laughter. She turns to see a postman.

'I go on holiday and miss all the action,' he says, 'this is the famous picket line, is it, girls?'

'Equal pay for equal work,' says a short, short-haired, bright-blonde woman, 'you ain't going to argue with that, are you?'

'Definitely not. My Sheila would have my guts for garters,' he says, to general laughter, and Vee, hardly realising she is doing so, raises the viewfinder to her eye and takes a photograph. She's not sure why, because she shouldn't be putting a man in the middle of this, really. Waste of a shot. Still, she's caught the moment. She winds the film on. 'Still not sorted, then?' the postman continues.

'Nah. They said we was irresponsible, and they said they'd have an inquiry. We said we'll come back to work when we're getting recognition for our skill.'

'Well, good for you, girls,' the postman says, 'so this is an official picket?'

'Course it is. We know how to do things proper. That's why your car seat never comes apart at the seams.' Everyone laughs at this, and Vee wants to drop her camera, to join in, but if there's one useful thing she's learned at the paper it's if you want to get a decent photo, keep your distance. 'You're not here to be one of them,' George, the senior photographer at the *Echo*, told her, the first time he took her out on a job, 'you're here to be the only one of you.'

'In that case, my fellow workers,' the postman says, 'it looks like these here letters won't be getting to your bosses today.' And he returns the bundle of envelopes to his bag and turns away. Vee clicks the shutter. She's got the shot that matters. It's not always obvious to the eye, but she feels it in her gut. And even though, if this image is ever published, the quality of it will be terrible – nothing looks good on newsprint – she will know that it's good. Really good.

'Oi.' It takes her a moment to realise that the woman striding along the road is calling to her. There is a solid fierceness in her walk that tells her to keep her camera lowered. Two other women are close behind.

'Hello,' Vee says, and holds out a hand. She's surprised to see it isn't shaking, 'Veronica Moon.'

The stranger's hands are in her dungaree pockets, so Vee drops her arm. Dungarees! She's never seen them in real life. Not on a woman, anyway. 'Does that mean anything? Am I supposed to know who you are?' Her voice has the confident sort of non-accent that Vee wishes for. It's not as posh as the radio but there's no trace of where she has come from in it. That has to be useful.

'Probably not,' Vee says. She's torn between continuing to do what she was doing – she knows she's within her rights, knows she has nothing to hide – and justifying herself. She's outnumbered, so, 'I'm a photographer with the *Colchester Echo*. But I'm really just here for my own' – what's the word? Not 'amusement', not 'satisfaction' – 'it's my day off, and I wanted to see for myself what was going on.'

And now the woman offers a hand to shake. Vee takes it, suddenly self-conscious about her bubble-gum nail polish. She doesn't wear her engagement ring to work, and she didn't put it on this morning. She tells Barry it's because she wouldn't want to lose it but she's not sure that's really the reason. It feels awkward, still, like the word 'fiancée' does.

'Leonie Barratt.'

'Veronica Moon,' Vee says again, 'Vee, for short.'

'Hello, Vee,' Leonie says, letting go of her hand and smiling. 'I'm writing this up for my column in *This Month*. Well, I might be. You came to have a look? What do you make of it?' The woman has clear skin, brown eyes, and her face, bare of makeup, is dominated by a large, bony nose. Vee becomes conscious of the half-hour she spent doing her hair and putting on foundation, blush and eyeshadow before she left the house. Putting a face on, her mum used to call it. Vee knows what she meant. She doesn't always feel as though her own face is enough. This woman – Leonie's not a name Vee has heard before – apparently has no such problem.

'Well,' Vee says, 'I'm all for it. Obviously.'

One of the women behind Leonie titters, but Leonie ignores her. 'Striking? Or equal pay?'

'Both.' Vee replaces the lens cap, and starts to turn away. If none of the Ford workers are questioning her motives, she doesn't really see why a journalist and her up-themselves mates

should be. And she gets enough of that sort of thing at work, from the men.

'Do you want me to introduce you to some people? So you can get some photos?' Leonie asks.

'No thank you,' Vee says. She's not sure what will happen if she starts to look official and it gets back to Bob. For fear of sounding rude, she adds, 'I don't want to get in the way. I'm not really supposed to be here.'

The women with Leonie laugh, and one of them says, 'You're missing the point, sister,' in a tone that makes Vee squirm. She hoists her bag on to her shoulder, ready to make a circuit of the action, shoot the last half-dozen frames on her film, and then head back to the car.

Better to make a move, than stay to be laughed at.

But Leonie puts a hand on her arm, and then turns to her friends with the fierceness that was in her stride as she walked over. She says, 'Come on. We support our sisters. Everyone starts somewhere.' Looking back at Vee, she smiles, and her brown eyes grow warm, 'Why don't we split, and have a drink? I'll catch you up on a few things.'

Vee assumed that by 'drink' Leonie meant 'tea' – it was barely noon when they left the picket line – but ten minutes later she finds herself in the George and Dragon. One of the panes in the door is missing, the space covered with taped-on cardboard, and the carpet is tacky underfoot. The mirror behind the bar has a crack running down the centre, which warps the faces of people waiting to be served. Leonie's friends, who are called Bea and something beginning with F that Vee didn't quite catch, go to sit down. Vee follows Leonie to the bar.

Before Leonie can order, the barman says, 'We don't serve ladies at the bar, I'm afraid.'

'What?' Leonie says, her voice loudening with incredulity. 'Seriously, man? It's 1968! Women earn their own bread, and they spend it how they want to. Christ knows, they could do with a drink in this bloody world, so your landlord needs to shape up.'

If Vee ventured a 'bloody' at home, Dad would tell her off for bad language, but the barman shrugs. 'Not my rules' – he indicates two men sitting towards the other end of the horseshoe-shaped bar, one of whom is looking on with interest – 'but I'm sure one of these gentlemen will oblige you.'

'What if we don't want to be obliged?' Leonie asks. There's an imperious tone to her voice, now: she means business. She might be what her dad calls 'entitled'. Born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Or at least went to a posh school, the sort of place with a hat as part of the uniform, like they probably do in Epping. She's not backwards in coming forwards, that's for sure.

'I'd be happy to help you ladies out,' one of the men sitting at the bar says. 'You go and have a seat with your friends. What are you drinking? I'll bring them over.'

'Thank you,' Vee says, and she smiles towards the man who's just spoken. She's drowned out by Leonie.

'Have none of you heard of equal rights for women? Liberation?'

The barman has long hair, a lazy smile, and a Tyrannosaurus Rex T-shirt. He's probably quite the local attraction. 'Yeah, we have, but you're in Essex now, love. Not your fancy bits of London.'

Leonie stands up straighter. She's not that tall, but she seems it, and she knows how to take up space. She looks the barman in the eye, and says, 'It seems that a prick's a prick wherever you go.'

Vee hears her own intake of breath, and sees that Bea and someone-beginning-with-F have stopped talking and are getting to their feet, coming over to the bar. This could go either way. Vee has seen it before. She and Barry sometimes go for a bar meal at the King's Arms on a Friday night. If an argument starts, it can either flare to fists or diffuse into laughter. She doesn't think there'd be a fight here – men who won't serve women in a bar aren't going to hit them, not in public at least – but it's not comfortable. So she catches the eye of the man who offered to buy their drinks, and smiles at him again. He laughs. The fine thin membrane of tension dissolves, and it's an ordinary lunchtime once more. Ordinary if you go to the pub for lunch every day, anyway.

'All right, then,' says the barman. 'Quick. What do you want?'

Leonie looks at Vee, a question. 'Sweet martini and lemonade, please.'

'Really?'

'Yes. I like it.' At least Barry and her dad don't tell her what to drink.

'Suit yourself.' Leonie turns to the barman. 'Sweet martini and lemonade, and three pints of cider. Please.'

The barman's hand hesitates over the pint glasses, but he thinks better of saying whatever he might have said, and pulls the pints.

'There you go, ladies.'

'Thank you,' Vee says.

At the same time, Leonie answers, 'We're not ladies, we're women, but I really don't have the time to go into that now.'

When they get to their table and sit, Vee is more relieved than she would think it was possible to be, perched on a wobbly stool in a dingy pub with three strident women she barely knows. Then a gaggle of men arrives and fills the place with smoke and

swearing, and attention moves away from the women. Vee feels herself exhale, long and slow, as though she's just got away with something, though she honestly couldn't say what.

From the way that some of the men greet Leonie and the others, and from their not-from-round-here accents, Vee gathers that they must be journalists covering the strike. Covering the strike *too*, she tells herself. She is a professional photographer and she got a great shot back there. Come on, Vee.

The others drink without comment; this must be normal for them. Leonie turns to Vee, and says, 'You shouldn't flirt men into buying drinks for you. You shouldn't appease them when they're being pricks like that. It doesn't help any of us, in the long run.'

Vee holds her gaze. She's impressed by this woman – the unapologetic way she goes about what she sees as her business, her bravado – but she's fought for her career, such as it is, and before that she fought for her place on a photography course where she was the only woman. 'So what do I do? What you tell me?'

Bea laughs, a wet splutter. 'She's got you there, Leonie.' Then, to Vee, 'You need to keep her in her place. Stand up for yourself. It's not just the men who are the oppressors.'

Leonie has the grace to laugh too, and then she looks at Bea, slides her hand under the table and squeezes her thigh. Vee feels herself blush as she realises what she's seeing. It took her a moment to recognise flirting out of its usual context. And then Leonie turns back to her, 'I didn't mean to sound patronising. What I was trying to say was that women have learned to get what they want from men by wheedling around them. But actually, we have the right to ask.'

Vee nods. 'It's easier, though. Ain't it?'

'It's easier to work for seventy per cent of what men get paid than to strike,' Leonie counters, 'but if we're satisfied with that – we're never going to get anywhere, are we?'

'No,' Vee agrees, and then she thinks about her dad, how he would order a drink at the bar for a woman if those were the rules, 'but those blokes just wanted to help us out, didn't they?' She's drinking too quickly, and she didn't have breakfast. The alcohol is going straight to her head. She feels as though this is an important conversation, but she can't hold on to the threads of it for long enough to work out why. It relates to the feeling she had, earlier, photographing the women on the picket line; that there's something else going on in the world, that she has a job greater than trying to be taken seriously.

Someone-beginning-with-F is tittering, saying something to Bea in a voice too low for Vee to catch. Leonie hears it, though. 'Shut it, Fen. Everyone needs to learn. It's hard to see how pervasive the patriarchy is when you've grown up in it.'

'I'm not Eliza Doolittle, you know,' Vee says. She wants to say, 'I'm not sodding Eliza Doolittle', but her dad doesn't like her swearing. And though that's probably patriarchist (that might not be the word, Vee thinks) of him, she loves him, and he's all she's got, apart from Barry. He might not be exactly on board with women's lib but he's always been on her side, always taught her things she wanted to know and encouraged her to follow her career.

'Quite right,' Bea says, 'you tell her.' Leonie and Bea grin and Fen gets up, returning a few minutes later with four pints of cider. By then Leonie's told her about the magazines she writes for, the stories that are coming up, the groups that are forming and the way that women are starting to make change happen for themselves, to organise, and Vee feels a fizz inside, something more than the martini and the cider she's adding to it.

Fen and Bea leave after the second round; Vee and Leonie stay for another. As Bea and Leonie arrange to meet up later, they kiss, lip to lip, Bea's hand, briefly, on Leonie's throat.

'You can stop staring,' Leonie says.

'Sorry,' Vee says, and the cider, helpfully, adds, 'it's just that I've never met lesbians before. I think you're my first lesbians.'

Leonie laughs, 'I doubt it,' she says, 'and anyway, I'm not a lesbian. I just go with women some of the time. The rest of the time, I go with men. But, on behalf of the lesbians, hello.' And Leonie leans forward and kisses Vee on the mouth. There's a chorus of whistling from the journalists at the bar; Leonie gives them a V-sign and they laugh. Vee doesn't know which is worse: the kiss, the odd soft buzz of it, or the feeling of being drunk, or the centre-of-attention discomfort that having a camera usually protects her from.

'I've got a fiancé,' she says, 'we've been going steady since we were fifteen.' Because one thing she is certain of: you can flirt (whatever Leonie says), but you don't want to be a tease. And that must apply to lesbians too.

'Good for you,' Leonie says, with a smile Vee doesn't really like. One of the crowd at the bar brings two more pints over. Leonie tells him to sod off, and he responds by telling her to sod off herself. From this, Vee gathers that they know each other. One of the strangest things about working at the paper is how rude everyone is to each other. Vee's dad is a great believer in good manners and the result of this, for Vee, is that she spends most of her working life being either mocked for her politeness or shocked into silence by the casual, inconsequential rudeness of her colleagues. She cannot imagine what would provoke her father into telling anyone to 'sod off'. And if he knew she was in a pub, talking to someone who uses the word 'prick' in public, he would not be happy.

'He wants us to get married next year,' Vee adds.

Leonie feels around in her pockets, pulls out a tin and starts to roll a cigarette. She, Bea and Fen had been smoking Bea's

Benson & Hedges before. Vee had declined. She has tried smoking, with some of the typists from work who gather around their pooled copies of *Marie Claire* and *My Weekly* at lunchtimes: she just doesn't like it. It makes the inside of her mouth hot, unpleasantly tingly. She can say the same thing about kissing women now. Maybe. Though everything, the first time, is more strange than anything else. 'What do you think about that?' Leonie asks.

Vee says, 'I don't know. I think we should wait a bit longer. He says I can keep working, and all that. At least until we have a baby. But he says we don't need to do that straightaway.'

'Does he? That's good of him.'

Vee knows that Leonie is being sarcastic, and she can see that, for a lot of women, that sort of situation would be sad; they would be wasting their capabilities. But Leonie doesn't know Barry. Barry's mother has never worked, and she's always making digs about Vee's 'little job', like it's a joke. But Barry takes Vee seriously. 'He wants me to have a career. He thinks it should be normal for women to have serious jobs, not just work for pin money.'

Leonie takes a drag on her cigarette. 'What do you want? Surely that's the question.'

'Me?' Before she got here, Vee had been thinking that she has all that she wants, really. Her job isn't perfect, but she can learn, and even if she is going to have to work her way up and earn respect, she'll get there. She has enough money coming in, and Dad's happy, and Barry's happy. But sitting here, in a pub where the same people have been sitting on the same barstools for what looks like fifty years, and where close by, women in short dresses are shouting for their rights, like they really believe they deserve it, she's no longer sure that what she has is happiness. If you see a wrong, right it, her dad says when he picks up other people's litter from the pavement outside their gate.

'Yes, you. There's no one else here that I'm talking to, honey.'

'I want . . .' Vee senses that only her most audacious dreaming will be good enough for Leonie. 'I want to take photographs that mean something to people.'

No, that's not it. All photographs mean something to someone. Her first efforts, blurred line-ups of family and a shaky shot of a birthday cake, are terrible attempts at capturing moments, but that didn't stop Dad from sticking them in an album.

She tries again.

'Women,' she says. As she speaks the word, she realises that that was why she got the feeling she did at the picket line when she pressed the shutter. It's what she's been feeling her way towards, at the paper, even though every time she tries something different she gets shot down. Her photos of women talking over a cup of tea at a coffee morning are not used. Her photographs of women in a line, one holding a wonky home-made cake on a plate, one with a teapot, are what Bob wants. Even though no one looks comfortable; even though there's nothing in these line-ups that isn't interchangeable with last week's church fair, tomorrow's get together at the Mothers' Union. 'I want to take photographs of women where they look like . . . themselves.'

Leonie doesn't take her gaze from Vee's face. Vee feels her intention forming as the words emerge. She has the feeling that she is waiting to see what she will say, as much as Leonie is. 'I mean – women are always meant to look like something, aren't they? Like their job. But most of them ain't good jobs, real jobs, like being a carpenter or a lawyer or something. So photos are usually being somebody's wife, or with something they've baked, and even if they're something like – like a singer, like Dusty Springfield, they still have to look – their looks still matter more than they would if they were a bloke. I mean, look at Pink Floyd. Women couldn't get away with that.'

Leonie nods. 'And how does all that fit with getting married?'

'I don't know.' The cider is going down quickly. 'Barry wouldn't mind. And anyway, why shouldn't I get married if I want to? What else are women supposed to do?'

Leonie lights her roll-up. 'Well, if they've got the guts, they could follow their heart. They could take their profession seriously. They could build a career. If they had a vision. And they recognised that the world was about to start taking women seriously. In all respects.'

Vee sits up straighter at the thought of herself as being someone with a vision. The room rocks. 'Is that really going to happen, though?'

'Well,' Leonie says, 'we've got Barbara Castle in our corner. That's one woman in the Cabinet. It's a drag that there's only one, but it's a start.'

'There are loads of MPs this time, though.' Vee's father had commented on it, after the 1966 election, with something like wonder.

'Twenty out of six hundred plus,' Leonie says, 'that's not what I'd call representative.'

'No.' Vee should have thought of that.

'We've got the women out there bringing Ford to a standstill, because for all their production lines and big swinging bollocks, those men can't make cars without seats – and the women are the only people who know how to do it. We're getting power. We deserve power.'

Vee feels her head nodding. 'Yes we do,' she says.

Leonie balances her roll-up on the ashtray, takes off her cardigan. The peace badge on it clatters against the edge of the table. Vee catches, unexpectedly, the scent of lavender; then a glimpse of unshaven armpit. There are jokes, of course, about women with hairy armpits, but Vee has always imagined they are an

exaggeration, a cliché. Because surely having clean, smooth armpits is the same as having clean teeth or brushed hair? Vee feels something close to queasy, and at the same time she wants to put her finger in it, just to see how it feels. Her own armpits have been scraped smooth once a week for as long as she can remember. It's just what you do. Her friend Patty's mum had showed them both how, the summer they were fifteen. Leaning back against the wall behind her, Leonie asks, 'Why do you like taking photographs?'

She just does. She always has. After Betty's wedding, whenever her dad got out his precious Contax rangefinder on holidays and at Christmas, she asked and asked until she was allowed to use it, then she asked and asked until she got a camera of her own.

Leonie's gone back to smoking, and though she's watching Vee, she doesn't seem impatient for an answer. Oh, this is pleasure: not to feel compelled to say something clever, fast, not to have to dive into a silence, say anything, if there is to be any hope of being heard. If work were like this, she might get further, faster.

'I think,' she says, 'I like being able to control what I see. What other people see, when they look at my photos. I can tell the story how I see it. But nobody knows I'm doing it. Not really. They think the camera never lies, don't they?' The black box of the viewfinder that holds the whole world, in that instant: the way that, in moving the camera, or zooming in, just a little, she can change the story, make something else important – that's what Vee likes. Well, one of the things. Leonie nods, and then she seems to wait for more.

'And so it's—' Vee takes another gulp of her drink. 'Control. Yeah, control. I took photos at my little cousin's wedding last year. Her mother was a cow to me when my mum died. I was only eight. She told me I needed to grow up. And so I cropped a

little bit of her out of every photo I took. Top of her hat, end of her legs. She'd got these new shoes, went on and on about them beforehand, how pricey they were. Them shoes ain't in one single photo of that wedding.'

Leonie laughs, a throaty half-bark, head thrown back, shoulders rising. 'Woman, beware woman.'

'It was nothing to do with her being a woman,' Vee says. 'It was because she was a cow.'

'Well, good for you. So you like – control.' Leonie takes a drink. 'What else?'

'Hiding,' she says.

Leonie cocks an eyebrow.

'Nobody sees the photographer. I mean, they see you, but they ain't interested. They only really see the camera. So you're not the centre of attention. Not if you don't want to be.'

'Why wouldn't you want to be the centre of attention?'

She will never know what makes her say the next thing. Maybe it's that she's already mentioned her mother's death. 'I hated it when my mum died. There was just me and my dad. People came and they wanted to help but it was like – like the zoo. If you cried, they were all over you. If you were normal, they said you were in shock. If you made them a cup of tea you were brave and good. I couldn't stand it.'

'I don't blame you,' Leonie says. 'When my father died and me and my sister were the same. A friend of our parents' came to pick us up from boarding school. We barely knew him – he used to come to dinner parties, but we were always sent to bed – but he still told us that we had to pull ourselves together for our mother's sake. We didn't even know his name.' And everything that's intimidating about Leonie – the voice, the stride, the way she swears and doesn't seem to care, the kiss, the armpit, the general lack of apology that seems stitched into her – drops

away. It doesn't matter. Vee isn't out of her depth anymore. Because all she's doing is sitting at a table with a woman who looks as though she might understand. Leonie sighs, smiles, drinks, and then the bravado's back. 'So, you have power, and you have invisibility. And you like it. And you want to use it.'

'Yes.'

'Welcome to feminism,' Leonie says. 'We need sisters like you.'

'Thanks,' Vee says. She must be a feminist, then. Although at work the word feminist is usually followed by 'ball-breaker'. This might not go down well with Barry. She finishes her pint. He wouldn't like that either.

Leonie smiles a sideways smile, something that would look like flirting on a man, and asks, 'How about we get some food, soak this lot up a bit, and then you take my photo? That would be groovy.'

'Groovy,' Vee repeats. She's never heard anyone say that in real life before, only on the TV. Being with Leonie feels like being at the heart of something.

As she drives home, Vee thinks back to when she and Barry got engaged. They'd been boyfriend and girlfriend for four years, since they were fifteen, and he is good and kind, and they have a laugh. It was the logical next step, he said, and she agreed. The night they talked about money and planned for the future is nearly six months ago now but she's never forgotten how she felt. She'd slapped his hand away when it started to slide up her thigh, because she was tired, and it felt too much like he wanted a reward for telling her what his wages were. And after he'd gone she'd worked out what she might earn, before she had kids, what she could earn afterwards, if she went back to work part-time. And when she'd seen the difference between what she would

be likely to achieve, and what Barry could take for granted as an estate agent, even without commission, she'd felt stupid for thinking of herself as a career woman. It had seemed that there was no such thing.

When she gets back, Barry is at the house. She'd forgotten they were supposed to be going to the pictures. 'Hello, love,' she says, and he looks at his watch before kissing her on her cheek. He's always prompt, is Barry. Reliable. That's one of the things Vee and Stanley like about him. He can be funny, too, and kind. 'You smell like a brewery. What have you been doing?'

'Really?' Stanley looks concerned. 'You know it's not a good idea to drink if you're driving, treasure. And now they've got breathalysers.'

'I'm not drunk. I had a drink at lunchtime, that's all. Just . . .' Vee thinks back, and subtracts the last round for the sake of peace, 'a sweet martini and a pint of cider.'

'A pint?' Ah, of course – these two won't be fans of women drinking pints.

Well, may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. 'Yeah. With some lesbians I met. Now come on, we don't want to be late for the film.'