

1984

Just Thought You'd Like to Know

Joan DeWitt
Denison University

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Recommended Citation

DeWitt, Joan (1984) "Just Thought You'd Like to Know," *Exile*: Vol. 31 : No. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol31/iss2/5>

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"Just Thought You'd Like to Know"

Okay Mitchell, so I've been sitting here dressed and ready to go for close to forty-six minutes. I've been reading the same three pages of today's, February the second, the thirty-third day of the nineteen hundred and eighty-fifth year of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ sunny but temperatures in the twenties tomorrow *Milwaukee Sentinel* for pretty close to forty-three of those forty-six minutes. Give me ten or fifteen more and I'll have them memorized. The other pages, which would make this a complete newspaper, one which contains sports, local news, the grand news of the national, comics, obituaries — everything a person needs to know for day to day existence — already have been confiscated by Julie.

Julie, my sister, you certainly remember her Mitchell? Fascinating, isn't she?

She used the pages earlier this afternoon to soak up the ironed wax from her latest batik, a purple and blue conglomeration that looks rather like a bruise or one of those rags gas station attendants use to clean your windshield. But don't tell her that. She calls it "Union."

"Union?" you ask.

I was afraid to, believe me. She is quite sensitive about her art. You might want to ask her about it though. When you get here. She likes you Mitchell. You are a charmer, a challenge.

For forty-seven soon to be forty-eight minutes, count them, the clock's in the kitchen, I've been waiting for you. Not a terribly long period of time to wait, mind you. We all do our fair share of waiting (at the gas station, the bank, the grocery, restaurants, innumerable places). This is not an abnormal, bizarre or even mildly odd thing I am doing. Quite normal, I believe. Yes, exceedingly normal. A propos, if you will. I do not think my waiting for you, Mitchell, is based on gender differences. I do not think my waiting is due to the patriarchal nature of our society. I do not think you are sexist. Julie, my older sister by seventeen months and roommate for the past seven, as you well know, however, thinks differently. She is not pleased with my situation here.

A ce moment, she is in the kitchen making a lemon cake — from scratch — to celebrate the one hundred eleventh anniversary of Gertrude Stein's birth. She is going to a party tomorrow at Susan's. She will borrow my car and just drive right over there. She has done enough waiting in her time, she says, for members of the opposite sex. She goes to a lot of parties like the one tomorrow. Cause parties, they are. But

don't tell her that. She loves them. And she will have a good time. I will hear all about it. They will probably play guitar, sing for a while, maybe dance. Get drunk, they will. They will talk about the hell men have made of this world and the worsening situation in Nicaragua. Don't take it personally, Mitchell. Not you specifically, men in general. And, at the party, they will fantasize.

About what? you ask.

They will fantasize about revolution, Mitchell. They will fantasize about a revolution — en masse — which will begin with the entire Republican party drowning when the yacht on which they are celebrating Nancy's adoption of a seven year old Ethiopian boy through the C.A.R.E. program sinks off the coast of California. The entire event, they will fantasize, will be filmed by a totally female film collective. The film collective will just happen to be hovering above the area in a helicopter at that particular time. Their footage of the disaster will be shown on national television. The female filmmakers will receive such acclaim for their poignant portrayal of such a tragedy that they will receive jobs with all three major news networks. Their feminist insight will revolutionize both the film and television worlds, and life will get brighter for all of us. Fact is, Mitchell, I could really care less about what Julie will be doing tomorrow. I've got my own life to lead. My own seeds to sow. I thought you might be interested though. She's unbelievable, isn't she? Just out of this world. And her cake, her cake. Her cake will be wonderful. Look, taste, smell, feel, even *sound* wonderful. Everyone will enjoy it, Mitchell. She may save you a piece if you ask her. She is an excellent cook, I must give her credit there. Just ask her for a piece. It's worth a shot.

I want you to know, Mitchell, that I am not offended in the least, now, that I've been sitting here. I could be doing something else, of course. I don't know, laundry or Jane Fonda maybe. But I'm really enjoying just relaxing here. I feel as if I'm enjoying my *self*. It's like the way you say you feel when you are on the golf course. I'm very content. Mellow. I'm achieving harmony with my inner self. And that is important. Just clearing the air here. Julie, however, is, let me see, not exactly pissed off, to be crude, just a little bit irritated though. I can tell by the rising shrillness of her voice.

"Women have been waiting on men for centuries. Veritable centuries. Hundreds and hundreds of years. Literally hundreds. Denying their own unique, feminine potential. Sacrificing themselves. A gradual suicide." That's Julie. She's spacing the closing and opening of the refrigerator and cabinet doors like that to give what she is saying a musical quality. She's artsy like that with everything. Brilliant, isn't she?

Sounds like there are three or four people in there. Three radio stations going at the same time. She can do that with her voice.

"Purposely floundering in quick sand as they anxiously wait for those men. For what? A movie. A drink. Marriage. Matrimonial Bliss. Paradise. Will it work for you?" (She is probably pointing with a wooden spoon out the window at this point) "That life happily ever after. Depressing."

You see Mitchell, Julie is at her finest tonight. You are giving her a controversy — yes, I think she considers this quite the controversy — to throw her entire self into. She is mourning the terrible, treacherous thing I am doing. Waiting for you to show, of course. She mourns out loud. "Articulation of thoughts occurs at a certain level of awareness," Julie says. "Oh the connections one can make by expressing, in a vocal fashion, what he-slash-she is thinking." Julie has that particular phrase posted in the bathroom above her toothbrush holder. This sign embarrasses me. Few people, few of my friends — those up and coming — use our bathroom, however. I like to get out of here whenever Julie is home (which is quite often). Now don't, do not get me wrong here. I am not trying to rush you. Take your time. I'm just talking about the way most of my friends perceive Julie. I am afraid, possibly partially paranoid of what she could/would/will say to my guests. My guests do not enjoy feminist analysis. Except for you, Mitchell. You seem rather interested in concepts of that sort. I'll show you the bathroom when you get here. Intriguing, isn't she?

"To wait is to deny. To deny is to wait. We must re-member ourselves . . ." Here she goes again.

She is as consistent as a Fisher Price talking toy, Mitchell. Instead of the animal sounds talking farmer toy, feminist mothers could give their children a toy something like, "Julie Speaks." This toy would have a small plastic version of Julie in the center and various situations and ideas — waiting on a man, self-defense for women, the feminist utopia — spaced in a circle around her. Point the plastic Julie to a particular space, pull the string and presto! a feminist perspective for free and healthy children. I just might mention this idea to Julie. Another project. Or maybe you can suggest it? She likes your humor, Mitchell, if you're interested.

"One must not forget that a certain fifty-two percent of the U.S. population is of one gender and a certain forty-eight percent of the population is of another. Who does the waiting?" Notice the emphasis she places on the word "who."

That woman, my older sister by seventeen months, thinks too much. And now, to be perfectly honest with you (honesty is important in a

developing relationship) since I have shared this apartment, the utilities, food, even my car with her for the last seven months, she has me thinking. Now I am not being accusatory. I'm just relating what has transpired in my recent life. Chit-chat, if you will. I am not thinking out loud yet (because I have not reached that particular level of awareness, Julie says). I might whisper sometimes, but I have not gone off the deep end. I've never screamed anything from the shower or the elevator or while watching television. Just thought you might like to know that. Julie screams things like, "Of course, Ronnie's polishing the guns for four more years! Tit for Tat!" or "Re-semble ourselves!" And, of course, her commentary a ce moment.

"What are you waiting for? Waiting. Watching our weight. Diet colas for breakfast. We will break fast. Damn!"

Julie does not curse often. Shows lack of intellect. I do not that often either. I am quite reasonable. I bet she has stumbled into one of the eight boxes she has placed strategically around the kitchen (like portijohns at a golf tournament, if you will) for recycling. Glass breaking, like little bells. Bingo, she has stumbled into a box. At times she speaks with her eyes closed. She says that she can actually see what she is saying — beautiful colors — when her eyes are closed. She's unique. One in a million, isn't she?

People usually ask us if we are moving when they see the kitchen and the boxes for the first time. I would not be offended in the least if you said something like, "Moving out?" or "Going places?" when you see the kitchen. Julie, though, would be. Offended, that is. She would say something to you like, "Plastic is forever," or "capitalist." She just spits phrases like this out. So don't mind her. It is really nothing personal. She reacts poorly to anything — which could be anything — she might consider criticism.

You can imagine this, I'm sure. Of course, you've experienced Julie only once. That was the first time we went out, right? You seemed to enjoy what she had to say. Yes, you liked her. You did not hide your admiration well, Mitchell. But I am used to your straightforwardness. Julie has been straightforward as far back as I can remember. Let's say, it's something I've come to expect in my life. I did not, however, expect Julie to greet you the way she did.

"Roosters are by their very nature rapists," she said the second she answered the door. Not a hello or good evening or welcome. I was on the verge of tears when I heard her say that, but I controlled. I was in the bathroom, if you remember. You were about twelve minutes early.

You laughed your casual, cocktail laugh, if I remember correctly

(I was in a mild state of shock — trying to control my tears and think of a greeting). You said, "Stephanie told me you like to henpeck." Now, I know and you know I never said anything about Julie liking to henpeck, but I must admit that that was an excellent answer. You're bright, Mitchell. Very impressive. You impressed Julie, too, if you'd care to know.

Julie impressed you, didn't she? She impresses a lot of people. Like I said before, though, you did not hide your admiration well. It was quite evident, your admiration of course, when you had me give you her basics, her vital statistics, if you will, throughout the entire dinner. Radical feminist, would be a separatist and move to Oregon, but feels a calling to stay here in Milwaukee. Been this way for going on three years. Works at a rape crisis center and would not survive except for a monthly allowance she receives from my father. Dropped out of college second semester of her Senior year because a diploma is a senseless piece of toilet paper (her words). Was an English Lit. major. Was perfectly normal until she read Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* her first semester at school.

"Fantastic," you said, breathlessly. Yes, you were breathless. "Does she like Rickie Lee Jones?"

I admit that this was a frustrating first date for me. It was my date, and in fashion, I thought the conversation would center around me. My life. Julie stole the show. She was not even there. She has a way of doing this. Always has. Just clearing the air here. Blowing off steam.

"Women are like Barbie dolls. They've trained us so well. Patience is a virtue. Don't question. Just wait. Wait and stay slim."

She really is creative, Mitchell. Personally, I think she would make an excellent actress. Let me tell you something about her stealing shows. I do not think she tries. The thefts just come natural to her. Take this for example. In seventh grade I had my first violin recital. It was a small gathering, maybe fifteen or sixteen people in the audience. Julie came with my mother to watch me. She was in the ninth grade. Two people were to play ahead of me, I was the third. During the second person's (it was Margaret Hamilton) piece, Julie got up to go for water. A rude move, yes, though Julie has been hyperactive in a way since she was a very young child. She was positioned in the middle of a row of metal chairs, our mother on her left, an elderly woman on her right. As she rose to exit, she stumbled and fell on our mother. Our mother's engagement ring caught her right above her left eyebrow and hit a bleeder. Blood shot all over my mother. Julie turned and blood shot all over the elderly woman. The elderly woman started screaming for Julie to get away, her heart, her heart. She was hysterical. Julie could not stop laughing. Chaos. Anyways, the rest of the recital was insignificant. My

piece was insignificant. It was my show. All of that is passé now, of course. Julie just has a way of stealing things. Always has.

I must admit also that these entire seven months with Julie, not to mention the most recent fifty-eight minutes, have been frustrating. From day one. Yes, from the beginning, this living arrangement has been awkward. A bad bluff. You play poker, don't you? Even Julie will admit that a certain clumsiness has prevailed, I think. If she doesn't take it as a form of criticism that is. A square (that's me) and a circle (Julie — the ultra-aware, forever-growing) do not make a pretty picture when you're talking tiny, two bedroom apartment for seven months.

And, in retrospect, I cannot say that I was not warned. I was. But let me tell you, I thought living with Julie would be the lesser of two evils. A dilemma. Here's the situation, go back seven months with me, if you will. I've just graduated from college with a degree in political science. I am not prepared for a real job yet. No resumes. Nothing. I am waking up from a spaced year of my life. Dorothy in the Land of Oz. I am broke. Negligent, I admit that. I can live with my father and Gloria, his twenty-seven year old, brunette live-in, or I can live with Julie. I'm confused. I've spent several months trying to get in touch with our mother. No luck. A little bit of advice Mitchell, do not mention our mother to Julie. I know this will be only our second date, and I'm dragging skeletons out of the closet already. But I just thought you ought to know, for dealing with Julie.

I am going to side step here. Our mother took off six years ago — out of the blue — for Texas or Alaska. She was not specific. She did not leave so much as a forwarding address or hint at any pit stops along her way. Julie was a Senior in high school at the time. I was a Sophomore. She's seventeen months older. Julie came home from school early one day because she got kicked out of her Logic class for saying "bullshit" to her teacher and she found a note. It said — "I've just about lost me and myself. That's two strikes. One more and I'm out. Me's the only one I got. I'm in Alaska or Texas. I love you all." We will never forget that note. It was written in orange crayon on the kitchen wall. Julie just about lost it. She and our mother were really close. Like sisters. She ran into the den to call our father in Chicago (he was away on business) and in red crayon, she saw "Don't take any wooden nickels. Adieu." That was the second part of the note. It was written on the wall of the den. I got home from school and Julie was a mess. It happens, I figured. After a while things calmed down. Julie went to college. I went to college. But we still have not heard a word from our mother since. We're

pretty sure she is still alive. Julie says that she knows she is, but don't mention her. At least not this early in the relationship. But honesty is important in a developing relationship, right?

Back to my dilemma. I talk to our father on the phone after the graduation ceremony (he could not make it — business) and the entire time I hear Gloria sputtering like a bird, a parrot, in the background, "Tell her to read her cards. Read her cards . . ." I tell our dad about possibly living with Julie and he says, "It's your life, babe." I look over at Julie who is smoking a cigarette and trying to pretend like she is not listening. She's made it to the graduation ceremony to watch her only sister conform to the ways of patriarchal society (her words) and it is her idea to live together. I don't mean to analyze or anything, but I think she wanted to help me see the light, if you will. Standing there, she looked a lot like our mother did. Brown, shoulder-length hair, five foot seven. A natural looking woman. Attractive. Just then I got this vision of our mother huddled in an igloo in Alaska, knowing on a piece of whale blubber, and there was no way I could have lived in our father's house with Gloria. "The cards do not lie. The cards do not lie," Gloria is sputtering as I hang up the phone. And, at the time I am thrilled with my decision to live with Julie. Looking back, I should not have let Gloria influence my decision. I know it. But things like that happen all the time. To err is human. For example, keeping another person waiting. Don't get me wrong, Mitchell. I'm not talking about you in particular. I'm talking about humans on the grand scale.

"We are nothing more than plebians in the eyes of their society." Notice the rising inflection of her voice now. The shrillness.

Now I love Julie dearly, Mitchell, but I cannot take much more of her mourning, her thinking out loud. I want her cake to burn, a ce moment. I envision it looking like a hockey puck—hard, flat and black—when she opens that oven door. If I wait much longer and listen to her much longer, something will happen. I am not trying to pressure you Mitchell, but Julie's working herself into a frenzy, and she does not need this much stress right now.

I give myself ten, maybe twelve more minutes, and then I will scream. I will be forced (I must emphasize "forced") to do this, Mitchell. I am a practicing pacifist, as you well know. And I will scream, "Enough Julie. You say one more goddamned word and your face will be made-up," (I must emphasize "made-up") "with that lemon cake you are making—from scratch," (once again, I must emphasize those last two words).

And Julie will come running from the kitchen, screaming, "Talk to

me babe, talk to me. Articulate those thoughts," something of that nature. I will scream at her again. And she will say, "Get it out! I'm with you!" Just about this time, Mitchell, you will show up. You will look casual, maybe your hair will be wet in back. Julie will knock you out with some phrase at the door. I will be crying probably. From embarrassment, mind you. And we will have a terrible time together because I will be distraught throughout the entire evening. When I return to this apartment, Julie will say matter of factly, "I told you so." And she will invite me to Susan's tomorrow. She's perceptive, isn't she? Just thought you'd like to know, Mitchell. Just thought you'd like to know.