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On the island where I come from

the law holds men responsible for unwanted pregnancies. A man who denies paternity of his own son will have his balls cut off. A man who denies paternity of his daughter will have his penis removed. As a result many men are unhappy with what they call the women's laws. Some talk nostalgically of the good old days when men covered their bodies in cloaks with hoods, and never even looked a woman in the eye before marriage. Back then there was no such thing as a girl taking a guy for a test-drive. There was no kicking the tires, no testing the wipers or lights. In those days a man was considered good enough just because he was alive. Because he was, as soon as he had a wife, what the goddess intended. Back then the people believed in the divine.

Puberty

Mercifully for boys on the island of Costa del Sol, the first signs of puberty usually happen at night. A boy wakes to feel a fire inside him, like an ache, a hunger, a wish, followed by the first prickling of wings. It hurts so much when the wings begin to break and tear through the flesh, each wing bone like a knife in the skin. (Picture it as the sharp beak of a baby bird pecking its shell. Only the shell is a skin full of nerve-endings.) Then there is the blood, the shame, the need

to cover it up so no one knows. This, the boy soon learns, is how it feels to be a man. Nothing he does, says, or prays can ever make him feel safe from what he has now become.

On the island where I come from

the women rule. They run the country, control the wealth, and decide who will do what, how, and when. And at the end of the day, when the women leave their office jobs, they go out on the town to enjoy what is known as the women's hour. In the bars, restaurants and spas designed for women-only, they relax and let out a sigh as the day's thoughts and fears rush off their skin. They linger there as daylight fades from the sky and whisper among themselves, making occasional cracks about guys. Men, they like to say, don't know how to love. Have you ever seen a man who even knew how to have a friend? The women giggle, imagining men as friends. Imagining men touching one another as mothers, as sisters, as girls, fixing one another's hair, lipstick, lives.

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Nin Andrews is the author of several books including *The Book of Orgasms, Why They Grow Wings, Any Kind of Excuse, Midlife Crisis with Dick and Jane, Dear Professor, Do You Live in a Vacuum?, Sleeping with Houdini, and Southern Comfort.*