

Instructions

BY RUTH YESELSON

(For Chris)

Abandon everything.

Leave behind your Honda Accord, the living room couch, the computer, your mortgage, your pension plan, the two t.v. sets, the compact edition of the O.E.D., a thousand books, the picture of your father teaching about the Cold War on Channel 4, the picture of your uncle on a pony beside a brick wall, the houseplants you have watered for 10 years, the Edward Gorey "Mystery" cup you keep your pens in.

Give up your lover's torso slipping over you, slapping against you; his arm, heavy and secure, encircling you each night; his regular breath, verging into snores.

Throw away Friday night out with your best friend, dinner then talk, every Friday the same and all good; do not undervalue your friend: she will forgive you.

Give away all your clothes and shoes, your sequined dress, the down jacket, those red pumps you bought on 5th Avenue, your silk long underwear, your leopard-print scarf, the tank-tops your mother sewed for you, the suits and skirts, underwire bras, lace panties, stockings, sweat socks, four leather jackets; reserve only one pair of jeans, boots, a t-shirt. When you need a coat, you will receive one.

Take your dog and hike the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine.

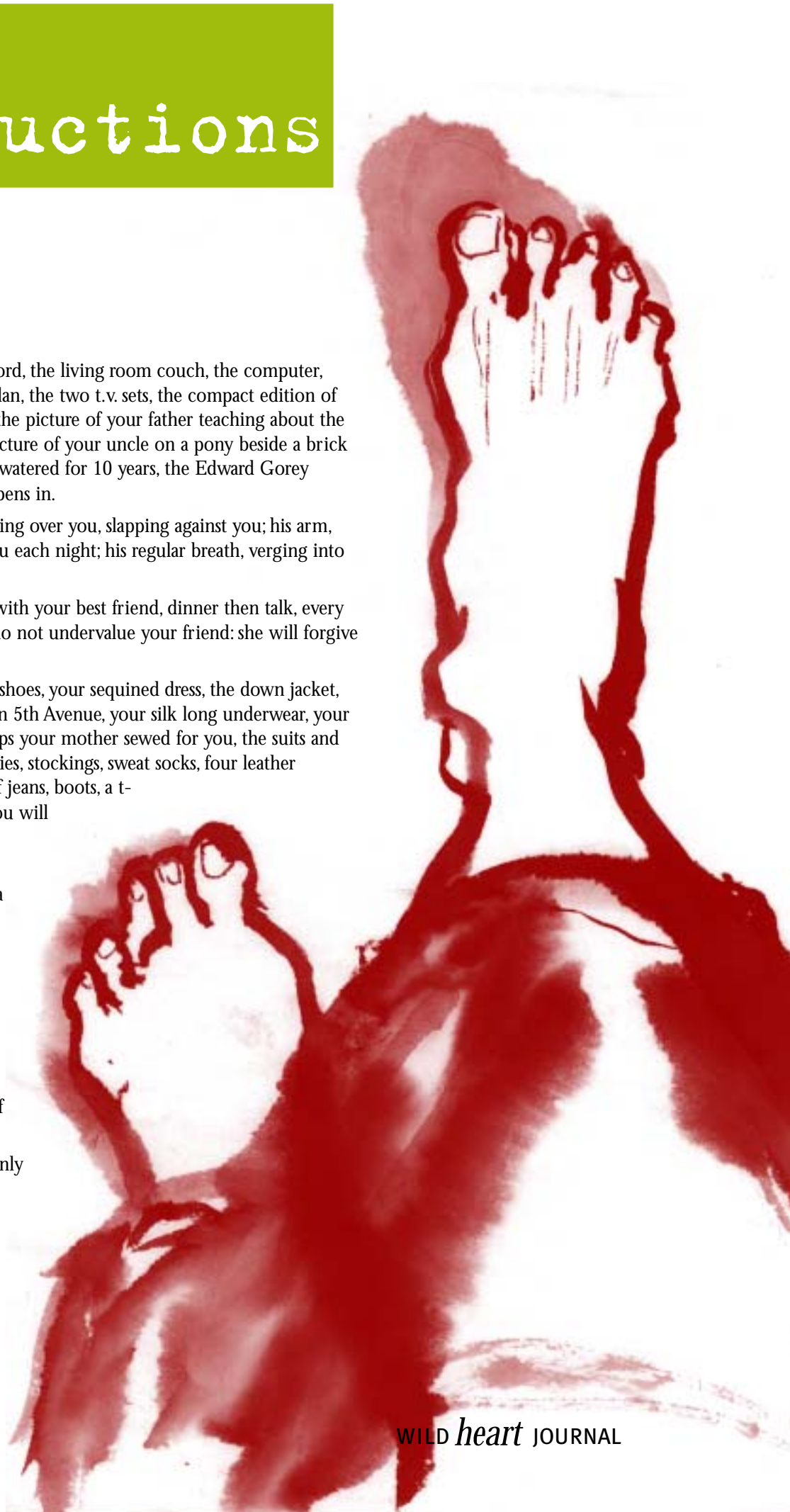
Settle down in a cabin there for the winter.

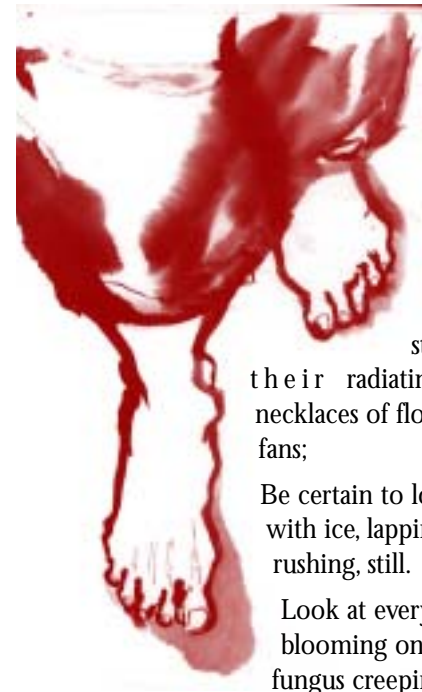
Work all day cutting and stacking wood, sweeping floors, peeling onions, taking care of children, any job that adds to the orderliness or joy of the universe.

Do this work gladly and take only what you need in return.

Come Spring, walk back to New Jersey; visit your family; do not stay.

Set out again; head toward California; take no money, but depend like Blanche on the kindness of strangers.





Yes, you may die on this journey.

Be certain, therefore, to look at the trees as you pass, the straight boles of pinoaks and their radiating arms, the dogwoods' floating necklaces of flowers, mimosas' whorehouse fans;

Be certain to look at the rivers, burgeoning with ice, lapping their banks, clear, muddy, rushing, still.

Look at every woman's face, every clematis blooming on each mailbox post, every fungus creeping over every fallen tree, all the dandelions--leaf, blossom, seed--the wispy hair

of children, callouses glazing men's hands, shined-up hubcaps, the patterns on dinner plates, christmas llghts, cows grazing beside the highway, the texture of earth that you crumble in your palms.

Love burns through our lives like a special effect, a white light; it morphs our possessions into ashes, our ashes into diamonds; it returns one thousand times everything that we abandon, one hundred thousand; love purifies us like snow: love sustains us like sun.

Hold out your hand.

--January 4, 2000