



## First Ladies, m. 1963—d. 1976

By Eve Brouwer

We were the first ladies . . .  
    Kay, Diana, Sharon and I.  
Ladies first—through doors, to be seated,  
    into aisles of theater seats.  
We were always ladies,  
    first, and foremost, and above all else.  
We'd been dutiful daughters, and virgin brides,  
    and became good wives, and loving mothers.  
Yes, we were ladies first, and foremost, and above all else.

We were the first ladies  
upon whom our husbands  
bestowed their names,  
the first ladies to whom they  
plighted their troths.  
A place of honor was given us.  
We knew our place and kept to it.

We supported husbands earning degrees  
and, by degrees, their masculinity,  
husbands who came  
    —and went—  
with impunity.  
We stayed still, in ladylike passivity.  
In still nights we stayed  
    —and waited—  
loosed our chignons, our French twists  
    —and stopped.  
Frozen in an earlier time.

The world turned and skewed, and,  
through curious eyes,  
we viewed askance  
    political revolutions.  
Through amazed eyes,  
we read, titillated  
    by a sexual revolution.  
With guilty consciences, we stood in line,  
signed the children into preschool.

Minute cracks in our polished veneer  
let longings in,  
let the Ms.'s hook their fingers toward us,  
let the Ms.'s beguile us thus.  
*They* kept their own names,  
Wrote their own vows,  
Took their own bows.

Looking back, are those our new "sisters"  
marching on DC?  
Is that us, sitting still, still sitting,  
watching on TV?

Yes, and then . . . the husbands left.  
Yes, and then . . . we fell  
into the abyss.  
Some to sink, some to swim,  
most to flounder, betrayed  
by our mothers' voices,  
our husbands' vows,  
our sisters' visions,  
our own ambitions.

Swept away, footloose, we lost our bearings,  
doubted our instincts.  
A toe  
touched a rock here  
A hand  
reached for a branch there.  
We loosened the weights dragging us down.  
Then grabbed them back to our maternal breasts.

We emerged alive, to find  
that women had put away  
their feminine touches  
—their pill-box hats, their white gloves, their recipe collections—  
had relegated their children to others' care,  
were pursuing degrees, careers, orgasms galore.

Through it all, even as we  
threw off the fancy hats,  
drew on more appropriate gloves,  
entered the no-holds-barred fray,  
it never felt right.

Behind it all, under it all,  
we were still  
ladies who waited  
for their men to return.