

*Maxe  
Crandall*

*The Nancy  
Reagan  
Collection*

**THE NANCY  
REAGAN  
COLLECTION**

# RED RIBBON



Her gown's  
a real sizzler

floor length  
Bolshevik with  
high-beaded collar

my little Galanos  
nesting doll

Nancy Reagan  
before me  
in the  
avant red  
I adore  
  
and shy away

What's a little haute couture to the woman who denies everything?

Trippy kitten telephone wires  
lead me back to the bunker  
choir, my secret rage

From here  
I remind Nancy on hold  
allegiance comes with a price

Signed with a nice *love always*

“I voted”

I can no longer give blood

Right into the future  
what Nancy wears influences everything

Even me her groping styles determine all for instance  
which window I open on which side of the house

What is for her  
a simple choice—

pussy-bow blouse

in nautical theme

worn in a waltz across White House sod—

a yawn toward the  
helicopter, her strident pilot,  
uncertain hand shading his eyes

Contingencies like these

dictate my week's reading

*Soul on Ice, Lolita,*  
a dash of Dickinson

Consequential events demand I take up tennis

possibly build a barn

Inside the barn, I discover

~~reading tea~~

~~verbena sacrifice~~

~~Mars in retrograde~~

~~shadow spells~~

Before long I learn to call her on capture

conjuring distant spirits

as if aircraft travel

gallant, as if

Through Nancy, I begin to see behind the image.

Not paranoia but the comfort of another dimension growing out behind this one starts to soothe pains, suggest lovers to me. So elemental, our one and only catalyst is allure.

Eventually my agenda becomes a shadow of what it once was

*Dear North Americans,*

*I collect Nancy Reagans. Will accept doubles.  
Payment in advance.*

*Seeking red ladies, vacation maidens,  
stationary Nancys. Those who read written upon.*

*Will consider  
damaged Nancys*

*even those involved  
in her hasty  
departure,  
in May of '87,  
to yellow.  
Those aren't her, aren't really Nancys.*

*The wind is our streets, a romance behind us.*

*Love, Satan  
(just kidding)*

S A T A N

In 1991 AIDS takes on the color of her party: a right republican red. Everywhere I looked for AIDS I'd find Nancy Reagan, in any of her elegant gowns.



In one unblemished glossy, she reclines  
across a plush red couch

our drowned mannequin  
washed to shore

prostrate in pointy shoes

costume blazing

and braided  
one over the other over the other

her stilted pose

sudden alarm on her face

her maddening inability to lounge

At the center of her coil  
that murderous pillow lies

embroidered  
like a gravestone

*R period R period*

The live self blinks behind the one represented

the self that knows its other

Nancys

My questions emerge

one

then

two

slimy  
bubbles

flubbing  
up against

the hopeless era

*What self is saved?*

*What self wants to save?*

I'm no Prince Charles but

*I sweat*

*hallucinate*

I swear on my life I once overheard

*why this fierce attachment*

Ronnie request

of Nancy's bewitching

fascination

Won't you, Mommy,  
my little devil,

slip into something  
a little more

red?



*The banality of AIDS strips the epidemic of its political and personal emergency; it shifts the drama inherent in all experiences of AIDS, regardless of status, from the deadly serious to the almost trivial. AIDS is represented as trend, as fashion, as style.*

—David Román

*What happened was like an accident, a collision.*

—Kimberlé W. Crenshaw

# FREE ASSOCIATION



On the title track of her breakthrough album *Control* (1986), Janet Jackson speaks: “This is a story about control.

My control. And I’ve got lots of it.”  
Everyone has a moment when they won’t go back,

when *shh* becomes shove, double for nothing.  
Mine is also a story about control,

about reading everything there was to know.

Most of what we could control early on  
became known to us through speech,

small bites of knowledge shared aloud,  
difficult to digest

without devising

otherworldly  
ways of remembering

[Nancy Reagan with William Novak. *My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan.*]

Her marriage: March 4, 1952. Her litany: *My life really began when I met Ronnie. I don't want to do anything else except be married.*



He and I both scoured the papers;  
our textures enveloped neoteric language.

Dropping courage  
down low

we jumped  
the yellow curb.

We skipped and screamed through everything sealed.  
What were we before or within, this uneasy arrangement?

*Whereas ritual  
mimics magma*

*a single me flows  
tributary and Roman  
toward the dancers*

*the moves  
who follow  
the madame*

*the mother me*

*and the witness  
of the quick and flash—*

*the child emperor*

*A MOMENT*      The two of us (me + my doppelganger,  
twin flames)      sit alone in the Café Morocco,  
early afternoon.

A quick brunch, leaning back in the booth, always  
helps us calm down, set right without that lasso

in our throats: “In the old days, what did you think  
about the role of sentiment in film, especially for

actresses searching for truth?”

Acting is what we had in common.  
And the erroneous assumption that

the *longue durée* of our lives would consist,  
primarily, of flouting the rules.

We'd seen *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), our travel  
built networks, all wise in the ways of Earth;

I had friends with friends on a leash.  
This sacred center is where we lived now.

And him. My destiny, my one and only  
glove clasped in the oval of my palm—

[Kitty Kelley. *Nancy Reagan: An Unauthorized Biography*.  
Bedroom.]

Nancy's three months pregnant when they marry. Her mother Edith is an actress, a figure straight off the stage of *Gypsy* (1962), who remarries before Nancy turns 10. Her betrothed? Loyal Davis, a respected Chicago doctor with right wing tendencies. Nancy and Ronald request a modest wedding present—a video camera.

To trace the uplift, so symmetry, of his face  
when his lips parted. He was about to speak,

to say *me with you* at me, a song and an ask.  
But shutter flash through the window

glaring with day, there she was. Nancy Reagan,  
the high queen of Sacramento, rushing by on the street.

[1943 Smith College Yearbook, embossed.  
Box Bin 1, wrapped in brown blanket.]

She is a size 4 her entire life. Neither Barbara Bush nor Betty Ford can stand her. For at least eight years, Nancy's staffers try to broker an honorary degree from her alma mater, Smith College (Class of '43). The more she wants it, the more it seems impossible to secure. So Nancy skips her reunions, makes no donations, and ignores the tradition of First Ladies extending White House invites to alumni. By the time Smith offers the honor in 1990, Nancy frostily declines.

Betty Ford studied dance under Martha Graham at Bennington. Pinch me, I'm warm.

Right there at the intersection of our three lives,  
my muscles locked down and closed forever,

helpless and beating around  
the one woman who could

ROCK HUDSON OCT 2 1985

In the flash I couldn't tell the difference.  
Change became my life force, my magnetism

a dream, that dream became him, the annals, another me.  
This excess belongs symbolically to Nancy.

My selves were a bundle I offered again and again.  
In response, she introduced me to everyone, one flower  
at a time.

SYLVESTER DEC 16 1988





# DAZED, FROM WHICH DISTRACTION

•

(Mouth of the Hudson)

Over the year Gipper rooted for me

—he really was—

considering how weak I'd become

something of a mirage

is being deserted

both miasma and

mise en abyme

his concern a canopy

I was held beneath

Violence is violence nonetheless

I was beginning to stoop low on account of my accident  
near El Cielo

Thus encumbered I rode the Staten Island ferry nearly  
every day to work

From my window I studied souls angling up      into arch

my mustache if I grew one

Back then I was entirely advertising and opera

disco and drugs

serenely composed

if little thought

in company

beside them danced

what I imagined was an escape

so many times before

There was what we called a mouth hole in the back room

I prided myself on hardly ever opening my eyes

One time I smelled gasoline

its sharp erasure

It was just like me

to be a midtown janitor

beaten to a pulp

after work in the dark

Nowhere to go again and

BOOM

that's when the market crashed

Suddenly the bars were empty

When I met him

I was limping through

—a bandaged risk—

talking to anyone who could listen

with people who didn't exist

The way she looked in me and smiled

the Gaze

Here was the Brutus apocalypse to keep us grounded

cord connecting face to air

Thoughts were coming like a pump where the rhythm made more  
sense than the how

the high why

We possessed no ideal

no vision of what

overtopping loss

across the banks

would look like

Within that horizon

the people you loved became the people you hated

what you hated slipped in where you loved

*Isn't it funny—it's always been that way for me:  
At very emotional moments in my life it's as if I'm in a daze.*

I fell for him as quickly as the sickness  
Whenever he made a move  
he had a custom of pushing his long slope of cheek  
toward the nearest exit

Then, one day  
the surgeons informed me  
with great enthusiasm

We're rigging him up a brand new stomach



# ALL WAYS, A HUNTED



In between the Nixon gigs that took them around  
the globe for free, Nancy needed to get things done.

Right and left, putting the help in a hand  
basket and playing a show to the owed.

CHARLES LUDLAM MAY 28 1987

Since meeting Nancy I'd had the distinct pleasure  
of landing on the shores of Hell, so to speak,

where demon people profit from doom.  
This was a dense area to cover on foot,

peering out of the eyes of someone  
who was supposed to be me.

It was urgent to see what I could find  
in a maze covering names in a feeling of politics,

to ascertain my weaponry within  
this series of berserk emergencies.

[Photo w/ caption "Fixed bayonets for Bayview-Hunters Point occupation." Newsprint.  
File Folder A-4.]

Ronald Reagan wins the California governorship thanks to white backlash in the state.  
On September 27, 1966 (Watts Rebellion August 11-16 1965), a white police officer  
murders Matthew Johnson, an African-American teenager, instigating the Hunters Point  
Uprising in San Francisco.

Research: what is the toll of indirect witnessing? Where does this story belong? Where  
did the photos wind up—of Reagan posing in *Look* five days later at the entrance to his  
Malibu Ranch, leaning against a grinning lawn jockey?

Joan Quigley, one of Nancy's psychics, instructs Ronnie to swear in at midnight, Jan 2,  
1967. They do it, they do it again in '81, and always, ever always the bloodbath begins.

From what I'd gathered, Nancy needed to move out of a mansion—and fast. “But where will you go?”

I ventured, choosing an upbeat TV voice that instantly filled me with regret. Nancy smiled one of her political grins.

“I'm working on it, but I could really use two thousand to get this realtor out of my hair.”

Glimmer.

I swallowed my own bitter pill, paying suit  
to Nancy's must-fund with generous donation,

whereupon I was gifted a spoon, with which  
I began a tactful excavation of Nancy's head.

She had opened the door, of course. I'm not rude.

[Unofficial, speculative rendering of architectural floor plans for the Carmichael  
Mansion. Self-drawn. Pencil and paper.  
File Folder C-12.]

Feb 1967: Fake fire alarm at the governor's mansion.

Nancy deems the mansion unsafe for her children, citizens, various groups of people she  
thinks about from time to time. Her favorite groups to think about are the Bloomingdales  
and Jorgensens, the Tuttils and Annenbergs. Names like that.

Nancy pinpoints a furnished 6,700 square foot 6-bedroom house with a swimming pool,  
pool house, and sculptured gardens. Two years later, their rich California friends buy the  
house and lease it to them for \$1,250 a month. Close call.

Meanwhile, in Carmichael, the Reagans build a new governor's mansion, an 8-bedroom,  
8-bath 12,000 square foot home so elaborate that construction isn't finished until 1975.  
When governor-elect Jerry Brown takes office, he won't live in it. No subsequent governor  
will live in the house. Too gaudy. The mansion doesn't sell until 2004.

I noticed at once that Nancy's hairdo was  
a dead giveaway, the kind of basket case that  
  
really bites the dust when you blow holes on it.  
By which I mean: each follicle, root,  
  
and death-defying strand acquainted me  
in an instant  
  
with the euphemisms of power.

MIGUEL PIÑERO JUN 16 1988

Although she hadn't yet achieved  
the hallowed grandma's nest

she would perfect in the White House,  
her bob was getting

shorter and shorter  
by the minute.

I thought of a stick of dynamite,  
the wick burning down.

[Typed correspondence (on letterhead) from the Joffrey Ballet. Request denied 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988. File Folder G-2.]

Ron, son of Reagans, joins the senior company of the Joffrey Ballet in 1982. Nancy and Ronald are terrified he is gay. Ron quits after one season.

Sometimes fathers never quit, son after son after son. Instead of attending eldest son Michael's wedding on June 12, 1971, the Reagans attend the Rose Garden ceremony for Tricia Nixon and Edward Cox.

*I RE-AWAKENED* covered head-to-toe in my own grime,  
phantoms or pheromones cluttering my head.

Nancy explaining the stakes of her persistent world:  
“I’ve been sick about this contractor for weeks.

I’ve laughed and I’ve cried, I tell you,  
but yesterday it dawned on me that the mansion is—”

*H-A-U-N-T-E-D*

I jerked hard at the shoulders, startled  
by our vocal togetherness.

KLAUS NOMI AUG 6 1983

As she slid my stack of green across the table,  
a wet substance began to bead at her scalp.

Was there a crack on the surface of her skull?  
I began to worry what fissures foreshadow.

Moral bankruptcy? Itself seeming to spring.  
Faith? The ploy is what you make of it.

“Bless you, child,” Nancy oozed.  
“Ronnie and I really value your

In a 1983 promotional photograph [framed, gift from F. LL.], Nancy drapes herself over the lap of Mr. T, who is dressed as Santa Claus.

Before he is “discovered” by Sylvester Stallone, Mr. T works as a bodyguard for A-list celebrities including Diana Ross. Mr. T’s aesthetic is encoded with history.

*The gold chains are a symbol that reminds me of my great African ancestors, who were brought over here as slaves with iron chains on their ankles, their wrists, their necks and sometimes around their waists... I am still a slave, only my price tag is higher.*



Support arrived from distinct corners of the globe,  
pouring in at first through a cascade of homosexual

anguish similar to its root force: preservation.  
As self-made protective shields

expanded around us, we became dimly aware of  
small villages on the outskirts of us.

Villages founded in endings and care.

["Raided Premises, by order of the..." Sign with string.  
File Folder C-6.]

In 1969 St. Louis teenager Robert Rayford dies and no one can figure out what's wrong. It's disgusting, the way the doctors discuss their puzzled confrontation about his mystery illness. Eighteen years later, his DNA is brought out of cold storage and sent to molecular biologists across the country.

In May of 1969 cops kill Cal student James Rector at a rally for The People's Park in Berkeley, CA. Governor Ronald Reagan sends the National Guard to UC Berkeley to break up the protests, outfitting 2,200 troops in riot gear. Everyone gets hurt; 123 are hospitalized. Ronnie warns, enraged: *if it takes a bloodbath, let's get it over with.*

Even riots can be occupied: in June 2015 the Stonewall Inn (Riot: June 1969) is recognized as an official landmark in NYC, in 2016 a national monument.

Our way of uniting was familial, if such can  
be said of a tribe of wild animals.

I paid the bill as was customary in those days.  
Then Nancy took my hand again in hers, the glove,  
  
and before long we were in the hills.