

¶ "Concrete and intangible, unique and indivisible, myriad and unchanging"

I Am Paper

BETTYE GOLDSTEIN

I am paper, made from rags and the pulp of trees. Without me there would be no civilized world, for I hold in my possession all human knowledge. All people, all times, all places know me. The poor grind me underfoot and the rich bow before me. Young and old respect me. Nothing is permanent until it is recorded on me, but I am the most impermanent thing on earth, for I exist in an endless cycle of destruction and rebirth. I could easily be permanently destroyed, but everything else would be destroyed with me. I am paper, concrete and intangible, unique and indivisible, myriad and unchanging, existing in countless paradoxical forms.

I exist in luxury and in poverty. Coarse, brown, I wrap food and humble packages; I know the arms of housewives and freckle-faced delivery boys. I enter the kitchens of rich and poor. I cover walls and wipe food from the lips of eaters. In thin, soft tissues, I caress silks and satins and velvets, exotic flowers, beautiful jewels, purchases bought with toil and misery, presents offered with joy and generosity, objects valued at fifty cents and objects worth five thousand dollars. I give added glamour to beautiful things. The women of the world associate my rustle with the pleasure of new possessions. The men of the world associate my rustle with the bills they will have to pay for new possessions. My inevitable destination is the wastebasket.

I am with man from his birth until his death. His birth is recorded on me. In rough tablet form I endure the first aimless scrawling of his babyhood, his labored writing as a tor-

tured school boy. As the years pass by, I feel his hot, moist hand grow more skilful and soon I offer a smoother surface for the quick movements of his pen. I help him learn to spell and to figure. On me he first creates thought. I stay by him throughout his education. I accompany him into the business world, where file cabinets are built to house me; typewriters to pound on me. What he wishes to remember, he jots down on me. He uses me to communicate with his business associates, to bargain and contract, to hire and fire. I bear his intimate talk to his wife and his children. I make and break friendships, arrange rendezvous, carry sad news and glad news, tragedy and happiness. Before he leaves life he uses me to record how he wishes his earthly possessions to be divided. And I bear the certificate of his death.

I am the carrier of the news, the molder of public opinion. Hundreds of millions of people know the touch of my coarse black-and-whiteness. Kings and beggars heed what I bring. Small boys herald my approach on the streets of towns. Men digest me with their breakfasts. I am as important to them as the air they breathe, for I tell them what is going on in the world. I form their thoughts for them. Through me one-half of the world knows how the other half lives. I bring life condensed.

I know the working of man's mind—the ecstatic inspiration of his poetry, his great philosophic thoughts, his labored scientific research, his pure reasoning, his pondering, his genius. I am history, science, litera-

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