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**AFRICAN FASHION**

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to love and desire.  
**CHOCOLATES**

# CHOCOLATES FOR BREAKFAST



**Interview by Emma Straub** I first read *Chocolates for Breakfast* by Pamela Moore about a year and a half ago, when Kevin—the author’s son (also my middle school French and Latin teacher, in a small-world twist)—gave me a copy. Originally published to wild success in 1956, it had been out of print for years, and the copy he gave me was a tiny yellowing paperback. The book is transporting; it’s the kind of book that gets passed from friend to friend, each one underlining his or her favorite sentences. The novel is about a 16-year-old girl named Courtney Farrell, who goes from sexual innuendoes at boarding school to her mother’s dim and intoxicating apartment in Hollywood to drunken parties on New York City’s Upper West Side. It’s like *The Bell Jar* soaked with sunshine or a prequel to *The Dud Avocado*, full of sadness and humor. The book is finally getting rereleased in a handsome new package this June, and I took the occasion to ask Kevin a few questions.

**Emma Straub:** When did you decide that you wanted to try to get the book back into print?

**Kevin Kanarek:** It started with the article by Robert Nedelkoff in *The Baffler* in 1997. He tracked me down and mailed me a copy when it came out. It was the first piece about Pamela to appear in over 40 years. I was amazed at how he was able to reconstruct her life, even her inner life, just from published works and an understanding of the social and literary context. He didn’t interview anyone or have access to her diaries and letters, yet I felt his portrait of her was more insightful than anything I had heard before.

Robert continued to send me things he unearthed: articles, contact information for people who had known her, footnotes in books, an interview with Courtney Love telling how she was named after the book. I also started digging into Pamela’s diaries and letters and manuscripts.

I had always felt that *Chocolates* should be reissued and that someone should interview the people who had known Pamela and document her life. I gradually accepted that I might have to be the one to make that happen. Once I started, however, it seemed that people just showed up to help out in miraculous ways.

**Emma:** What do you think it is about *Chocolates* that makes it so timeless? Courtney’s teenage years take place in the 1950s, but her story feels utterly relevant to me—I grew up in Manhattan and was a teenager in the 1990s, and I recognized so much.

**Kevin:** Maybe it’s that teen angst is timeless. Probably every generation feels it has to grow up without enough good role models, because you don’t want to turn out like all the grown-ups around you. Or just that she wrote honestly and gracefully from her own experience. Part of that grace is a sense of humor that’s very understated, barely cracking a smile.



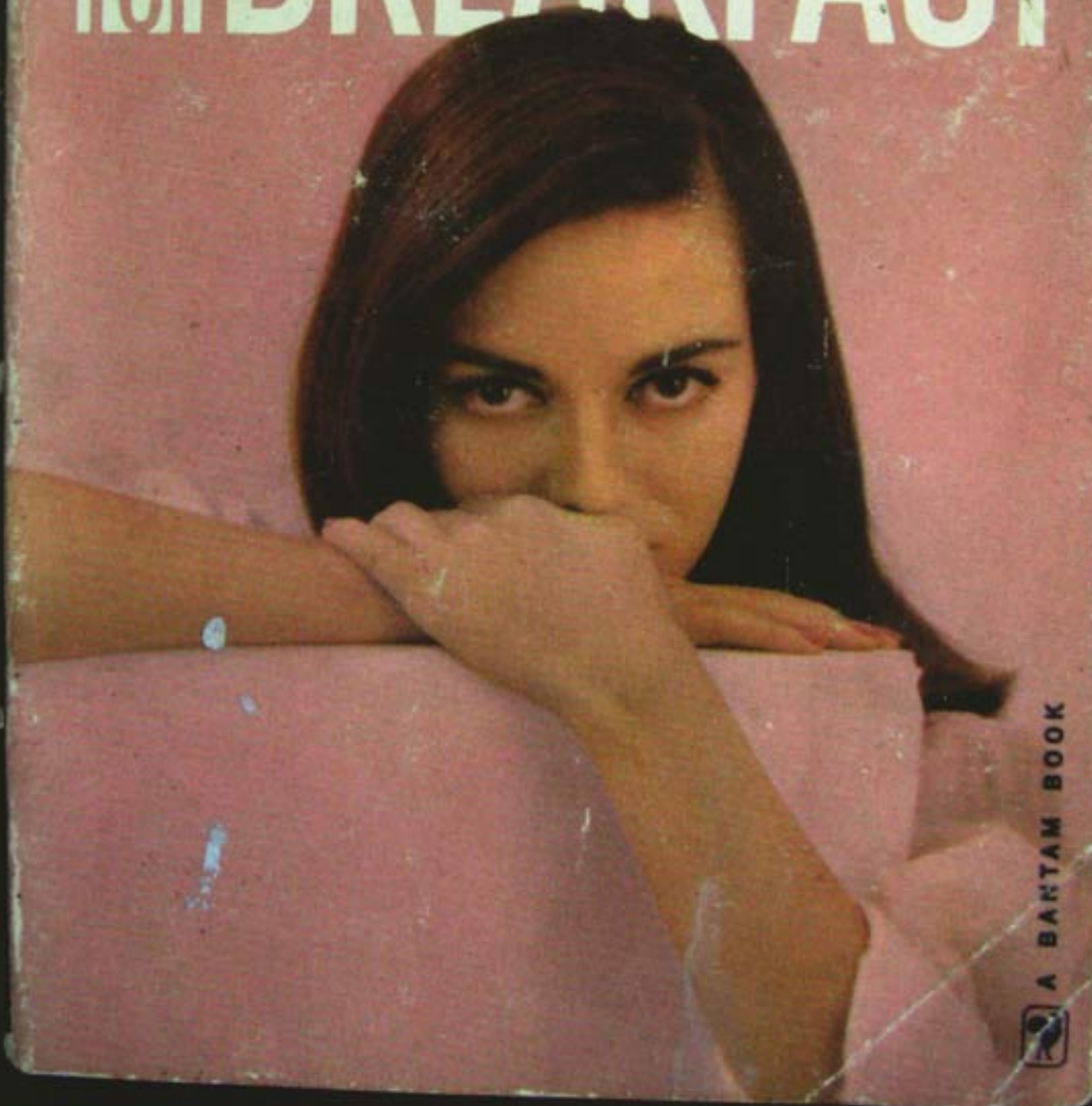
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2092 \* \* 35°

PAMELA MOORE

*was eighteen when she wrote this famous first novel, the astonishingly candid story of a young girl's sudden, urgent awakening to love and desire.*

# CHOCOLATES for BREAKFAST





*This page: Pamela Moore as a teenager  
Opposite: Pamela Moore's boarding school report card*

# ROSEMARY HALL

Greenwich, Connecticut

## REPORT OF THE HEAD MISTRESS

Name..... Pamela Moore ..... Date..... May 1952 .....

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Influence in the School				✓	
Attitude toward School Obligation				✓	
Concrete Service to the Community				✓	
Respect for School Regulations			✓		
Self Reliance			✓		
Ambition			✓		
Scholastic Ability	✓				
Scholastic Effort			✓		
Scholastic Results		✓			

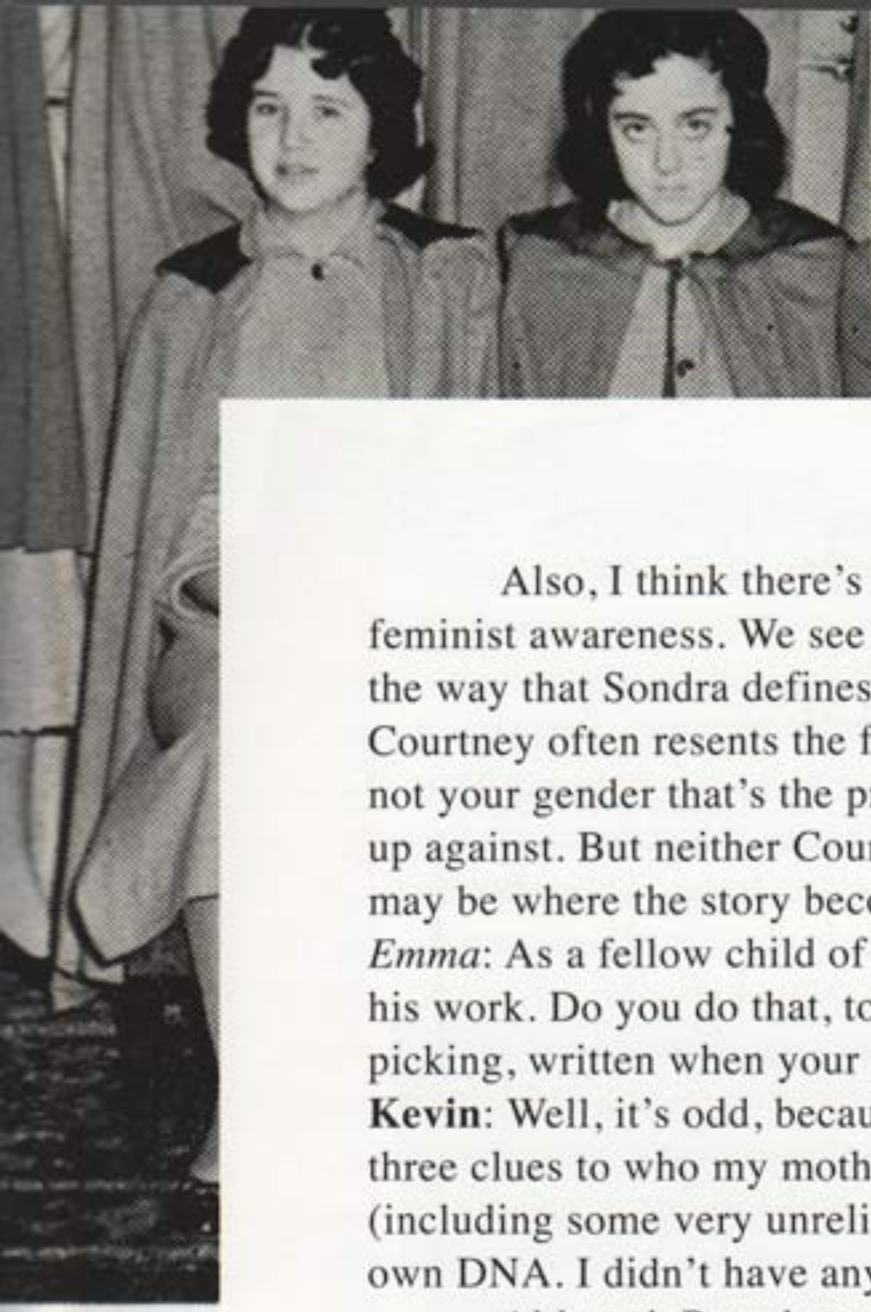
.....  
 Head Mistress

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### HONOR ROLL

Pamela has superior ability and many talents. She does well in her work in spite of making very little effort. Unfortunately she does not seem to think it worth while to take pains. She has been disconcerted and not trusted in life at school. If her attitude had been different she could have been helpful and could have made a distinguished record.

S.B. Jessup.



Also, I think there's something about *Chocolates*'s position in the timeline of feminist awareness. We see Courtney struggling with gender roles in relationships or the way that Sondra defines herself by her career, rather than her role as a mother. Courtney often resents the fact that she was born a girl, and you want to tell her: It's not your gender that's the problem; it's the social conventions about gender that you're up against. But neither Courtney nor Pamela ever seemed to gain that awareness. This may be where the story becomes more tragic than timeless.

**Emma:** As a fellow child of a fiction writer, I always look for pieces of my father in his work. Do you do that, too? *Chocolates for Breakfast* feels ripe for that kind of picking, written when your mother was only 18.

**Kevin:** Well, it's odd, because I was an infant when she died, so for years I had only three clues to who my mother was: her writing, the stories from my relatives (including some very unreliable narrators), and whatever of her was encoded in my own DNA. I didn't have any contact with her side of the family until recently.

Although Pamela wrote several more novels, *Chocolates* and to some extent her unpublished novels are the only ones that feel so pervasively autobiographical—it really seems she put herself in the book, rather than constructing a character.

Once this reissue was underway, and I started looking into her archives and meeting with other people who had known her, I had this flurry of dreams in which Pamela appeared, in different forms and at different ages: a teenager, a grown woman, a woman in her seventies—the age she'd be if she were alive now. Some of these dreams were very perplexing, but the overall effect was one of encouragement.

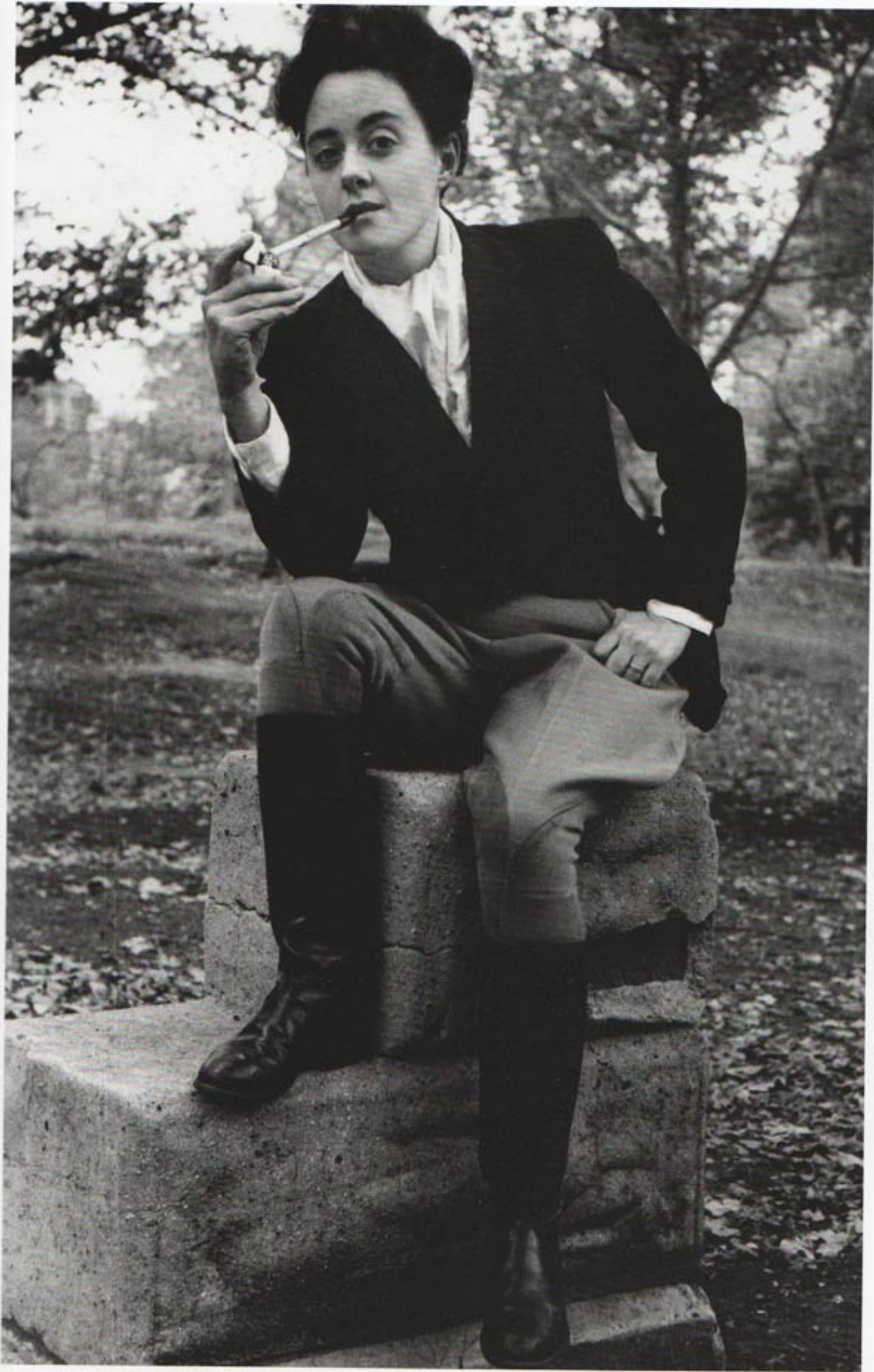
**Emma:** When it was originally published, the book was described as shocking and risqué—do you think that's still true?

**Kevin:** There are so many things more shocking than this book. Today, for example, most episodes of "Girls" go far beyond *Chocolates*, and a writer like Stephen Elliott gives a much more shocking picture of how adults fail and abandon the children entrusted to them, and how children can endure in spite of that.

I think *Chocolates* is actually not that shocking, now or then. It's more the chronicle of a girl who struggles with this sense of being set apart from others, especially her peers. She's intense, brainy, but also impulsive, privileged in some ways but forced to grow up too soon in others. When I began learning about Pamela's life, especially her mother, Isabel, I realized Pamela had toned *down* a lot of her story, though it still is largely autobiographical.

**Emma:** What do you hope readers discover in *Chocolates*?

**Kevin:** Hmmm. A picture of another time, when women were questioning their roles but had much fewer places to turn; places like the Garden of Allah, the Stork Club...an honest, questioning way of seeing things, suspicious of institutions and the hypocrisy of adults; a reminder that ultimately we each have to invent our own grownup selves.



Pamela Moore circa 1960