Female Troubles

June 1, 2004 By River Huston

When I picked up Paula Peterson's *Women in the Grove* (Beacon Press, $20)—nine captivating stories about HIVer women—my own writerly deadlines escaped my mind. Peterson's fictional tales conjure everyday lasses overcoming life's obstacles. The first—about Lucinda, visited by God while dying in a hospital—immediately piqued my own curiosity about the Creator. Her narratives from each woman's viewpoint made me feel as if I had lived with them.

I admit I was hard-pressed to find a woman like myself—most are financially-struggling, African-American moms. But when I asked Peterson about her choices, she explained, "I wanted to write about mothers with HIV, since their stories often go unheard." As we talked about our shared experiences as HIVer writers, I realized that Paulson's characters are not so distant: Their battles with work, relationships and getting through each day are the same as mine.

At first, I wasn't in the mood to read about women fighting HIV—if I wanted that misery, I could reflect on my own life. But *Grove* surprised me—it transcended HIV by interesting me in these womens' lives and how they resolved their own dilemmas.

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