

A black and white portrait of a woman with dramatic eye makeup, looking upwards. She is wearing a dark, leafy garment. The background is a textured, patterned surface.

# *En femme.*

Issue #17

Magazine

*Berrie Lyndon*



# *From the Publisher's Pen*

Well, this is our second issue of *En Femme* and we're still tweaking the layouts. I'm still not satisfied with the way it looks and neither is Betty. We'd both appreciate it if you'd let us know what you like and, more importantly, what you don't like. We really want to know.

We've had some feedback on issue #16. Many of you like the new format but missed the photos. I think we've corrected that problem in this issue, plenty of photos. We're always looking for articles and stories, so let Robyn Ann know if you have something to contribute.

One significant area of feedback was *The Transsexual Trail*. We knew from the start this would be a controversial feature, but, then, I'm not one who shrinks easily from controversy. If you disagree with Roberta Dee, write her and tell your side of the story.

This month Ms. Dee has some harsh words for transvestites. I strongly disagree with her opinions, being a transvestite myself. It seems to me that Roberta either had a bad experience with a TV or she is basing her conclusions about us from the trash "literature" written about us. In either case, I doubt that she has any idea of the community networking that goes on at gatherings like the IFGE Coming Together Convention, the Be All, or the Texas 'T' Party, to name a few. Our community has made great strides in the past five years to gain acceptance for **all** transgendered lifestyles. And, the future holds much promise for us all.

If Roberta doesn't want to be classified with transvestites, or even associate with us, I can understand that. Transsexuals are truly very different from transvestites. But, honey, don't trash me till you know me.

I'm really pleased to add two new bylines to this issue (surprise Robyn); Selena Anne Shepard' and Toni Mitchner'. I think we'll be hearing more from these two in the future.

Also in this issue is an exclusive cartoon from Angel. You've seen her cartoons in various newsletters. She has agreed to create original work just for CDS. Just one more reason to get the next issue.

I've got to finish this here. Betty and I are off to Las Vegas to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary and this has to go to the printer tomorrow morning. I've got lots more stuff to say later.

*JoAnn Roberts*

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**Correction:** In Issue #15, a story entitled "Carol's Afternoon as a Girl" was mistakenly credited to the wrong author. The correct author is Carol Francine. We appologize to both authors and sincerely regret the error.

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# Roberta Angela Dee

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## The Transsexual Trail

### The Pitfalls of Perfection

So many jokes and stories center on the perfect woman, who she is and what she is in modern society. The concept itself differs from class to class, among different racial and economic backgrounds, and between social and political organizations, countries and so on. The perfect woman might be a tall, well educated, assertive bitch in one culture. In another she might be a petite, quiet, passive butterfly.

Americans enjoy the privilege of examining several different variations of the 'perfect' woman. Most of these variations spring from the drafting boards of advertising executives. More perceptions emerge from the television studios and production facilities of day-time soap operas and consumer oriented commercials.

Some of America's most premiere cosmetic manufacturers depict one model in all of their advertising campaigns. The woman is always Caucasian, fair-complexioned and



blonde, sometimes a red-head. She always has blue eyes and "classic features." Ironically, the women who pack and ship these beautifying ingredients are often African-American, Hispanic, middle-aged, minimum wage earners. Although the product is used by women of all nationalities, the manufacturer intentionally portrays an image marketed to white, upper-class women. Why? Because they spend millions of dollars each year to preserve and perpetuate that image.

Essentially, it is the same image generated through most American media, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year. For all the debate on how safe or unsafe it is to eat apples or to drink coffee, no questions unfold as to the effect this constant bombardment of psychological garbage has on the minds of individuals.

One thing is certain: Media has the potential to shape or to reshape a society. This makes it as poten-



tially wonderful as it makes it dangerous and destructive. Women are repeatedly expected to meet standards set by advertisers who know nothing of what it takes to be a woman. They use psychologists and other women to use our most deep felt emotions against us.

The American woman, at least the Caucasian American, is transformed from the docile, domestic, and matronly character of the sixties, into the assertive, all-knowing, all-powerful, super-human Amazon, as she is now, in the eighties. Today's woman is in control, honey. She's bold and she's taking no crap from anyone. And as much as Helen Gurley Brown and Gloria Steinham would like to take the credit for this transformation, it is media that has made her dreams and social hypothesis a reality. Media has brought America into the age of the heroine, with women fighting off aliens, guerillas, kitchen grease, government, nuclear power plants, radioactivity, Washington bureaucracy and emerging victorious!

The feminist movement, per se, is not a bad social development. However, its philosophy has generated several negative results. The movement neither wants to accept the blame, nor accept the responsibility for its mistakes. The inability or unwillingness of the feminist movement to be fully accountable renders it somewhat irresponsible. Initially, the feminist movement included the lesbian movement. To a lesser degree, it included the

struggle of African-American women. To an even lesser degree, it included the struggle by crossdressers and transsexuals to achieve social acceptance and respectability. It has since abandoned these 'lesser' causes.

Lesbians try to achieve social change and acceptability through the somewhat broader gay political movement. The gay movement, however, is neither as powerful, nor as well-organized as the feminists. Nevertheless, gays continue to make efforts to improve their image and acceptability. Transsexuals and crossdressers, on the other hand, fail to align themselves with any of the existing alternative cultures. They fail to work together to achieve acceptance. As a result, transsexuals and crossdressers form a pitifully unorganized and uninspired subculture.

We profess to seek social acceptance. Yet, we do nothing to achieve that goal. As separate groups, transsexuals seek to merge with society after they have had their final operation. They shed their past identities as though it were an old ragged coat. Only within a very limited scope do they ever attempt to reach out to those who have not yet realized their goals.

Crossdressers (transvestites) are even less inclined to emerge as an organized political group. The objective of most crossdressers appears to be fantasizing about men, or gathering for parties to discuss

only the most superficial attributes of being a woman. They wonder why they are so often scorned, even by the gay community. They are scorned because they represent nothing that is truly meaningful. There is much more to being a woman than simply being able to look like a woman. There is much more to being a woman than merely having a relationship with a man.

The reality that most cross-dressers hate to admit to is that no one can be a weekend, or part-time woman. It takes, at least, as much of a commitment to be female as it does to be male. Yet, if you read the literature directed toward the crossdressing community, you find it consists mostly of fantasies and illusions. Crossdressers meet with no greater commitment to being women than to put on a dress on the weekends or while the wife is out shopping.

Crossdressing does not involve one with the social and psychological aspects of being a woman. They are unaware of the psychological attributes of having breasts, of living under the emotional influence of female hormones, of water retention, of difficulties associated with dieting, or of dealing with men. The list is endless. The average cross-dresser, unless they are living and working full-time as women, covers only a very small fraction of the feminine essence.

There is little that is metaphysical about being a woman. It is not a

magical realm that one enters and exits at will. We can afford to play dress-up as children; to play the same game as adults is little more than ludicrous.

The crossdresser dresses for erotic pleasure or to satisfy some very real psychological obsession or need. I personally cannot associate wearing or dressing, or putting on a bra with anything that is sexually erotic. For me it is simply clothing myself for warmth or modesty. Some clothes are pleasant to wear. And, I enjoy wearing some outfits because they are pretty, or because they make me feel pretty. However, I derive no sexual satisfaction from these garments.

The one real problem we all share — we who are becoming women and who simply dress like women — is the desire to achieve some impossible degree of perfection. This pit fall of perfection is common to the female psyche. We all desire perfect breasts, perfect faces, flawless hair styles, and so on. We are all victims of the Madison Avenue hype, the manufacturer's advertisement and publicity. For a variety of reasons, we are preoccupied with becoming that Playboy-perfect air-brushed concept of femininity.

The Playboy philosophy would be wonderful, if there could be a Playgirl mansion filled with handsome men walking around, scantily clad, at Mrs. Hefner's disposal, too.

Realistically speaking, most of us



are too puritanical to seriously pursue this rather exotic direction.

So, let's return to reality. Rather, let's return to the fantasy of being perfect women. That's an attribute we all have in common. Whether we are genetic women, pre-operative or post-operative transsexuals, or crossdressers, we all live in a male dominated culture which dictates that women (ladies) must be demure, slim, full-breasted, scented, colored, cheerful, graceful, elegant, intelligent (but not too intelligent), good-natured, obedient, kind, maternal, sophisticated in public and whorish in bed, dependent but well-organized, submissive, yet always protective of the male ego, and so on, and so on, and so on.

If an individual can master all of the aforementioned attributes and get along well with other women, with children, with cats and dogs, and not wear garments that offend animal lovers, she stands a fair chance of being crowned a lady. It's one thing to write about, and another to try to live out. Yet, these are the qualities and attributes all women are expected to master. Worse yet, most of us feel that if we fail to master these attributes, or if we do not bear children, look pretty enough, stay slim enough, or practice all of the Miss Etiquette techniques we were instructed to practice by our mothers (or developed through some other means), that we are less than ladies, less than women, and less than human beings.

The obvious dilemma is that we are expected to be, and accept the responsibility (burden?) of being perfect in an imperfect (sic) world.

What is wrong with being a motherless lady? What is wrong with being a lady who wears a sweat suit, no make-up, no earrings, no accessories, but is judged a lady on the basis of character and personality alone? We accept a man as a gentleman, even if he is wearing overalls. Why then do women need to wear a sundress and make-up to dig in the same garden, just to be considered a lady? Is there a double standard?

Most transsexuals and genetic women would agree with this argument. However, the crossdressers would be placed at somewhat of a loss. How could they be feminine without the trappings of femininity? How could a crossdresser crossdress without wearing a dress? That's the real question. And as a practical answer I suggest they could not.

It would be a wonderful world if anyone, regardless of their genetic origin, could be judged a lady solely on the basis of their behavior, personality and character. Personally, I consider myself to be as much a lady in jeans as in an evening gown. That's the attitude I've adopted; and I feel totally comfortable with that attitude. I wish more of us could adopt the same philosophy.

Many crossdressers will argue that it is impossible or totally im-

practical to consider living as a woman on a full-time basis. There are, after all, financial considerations (women usually earn less than men), their families (two mothers or wives in the same household can be difficult), as well as their relationships with professional associates and friends. In spite of the fact that I agree there are difficulties, I must maintain that unless you're living as a woman on a full-time or most-time basis, to dress as a woman is only to place yourself in a costume-party reality. Life is much more to me than a costume party.

Of course, there is also the argument that crossdressing is only a supplement to an otherwise full and complete life. If that is the case, then one needs to refer to himself as a transvestite or a female impersonator, not as a woman. Female impersonators and females are in two totally different categories, with totally different responsibilities, scopes and obligations.

I have little respect for the meta-physical, surrealistic, transcendental transvestite who dares to call himself a woman. He is not a woman and hasn't paid the dues to deserve that title. As they say in France, 'pee or get off le pot.'

I hate labels as much as the next woman. Labels are often used to segregate groups of people from other groups of people and to sever communication. It prevents two intelligent cultures from having in-

telligent dialogue. It's intellectual censorship. It's American Apartheid. It's stupid. I am not in favor of labels. However, I do believe in making distinctions between the needs of different social groups. I'm not Nancy Reagan. I can't, intelligently, "just say no;" because that's not the answer for all segments of American society. The needs of the working class differ from the needs of the privileged class, as much as the needs of African-Americans differ from the needs of whites, or the needs of the homeless differ from the needs of people living in Beverly Hills.

A society might have common goals. Certainly, two very important goals are freedom and equality. However, it is not necessarily true that the mechanism that works for one segment of the population will work for another. Someone needs to tell Nancy and Ronald, and now Bush. Someone needs to explain to these so-called leaders that it's not as simple as they would have us all believe.

We all want to be perfect. We women especially want to be perfect. Men, on the other hand, are taught to live with their imperfections, to make the best of their fat, little penises, and so on. They are taught that it's not the size of the tool, it's how you use it. Women are instructed to seek cosmetic surgery to enhance small breasts, or to cover an uneven complexion, or to highlight their hair color, and so on. What women really need to do is to



address these inequalities in society, and redefine what being a woman is all about.

I know by now that I've upset a lot of people, and have probably burst a balloon or two. As is customary to my gender, I apologize. I'm sorry. Still it's necessary; we cannot move into the twenty-first century carrying the same illusions and fantasies from the sixties and seventies, nor the same disillusioned concepts that carried us through the eighties. Sisters, it's time to wake up and smell the coffee. None of us are perfect. None of us need to be perfect. What we all need to do is to formulate realistic and practical objectives, and to work rationally towards reaching those objectives.

The next decade will include a number of new obstacles for all women. Although we have made many strides during the eighties, we must continue to work towards total equality. We cannot enter the next century carrying the manipulating elements that have plagued us for so many generations.

Will we all recognize that we face a common problem, or will we continue to work in separate little groups? That is the question.

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