

## Flowers of Every Kind

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It's April in Augusta. Time for the azaleas to bloom, the Master's golf tournament, Spring rain, flight of the bumblebees, and couples in love sitting on park benches.

It's April in Augusta. The Winter's clothes have been put away, rapped in mothballs. Time for Spring cleaning, airing out rooms and mattresses, washing windows and working up a sweat that's been afraid to come out for fear it would turn to ice.

The dogwoods have blossomed too. There are chrysanthemums, begonias, blue salvias, gold rudbeckias, purple coneflowers, and flowers of every kind -- as varied as the people native to Georgia.

Flowers have always intrigued me. For all the many varieties, they grow together, die together, and eventually decay together. They're nothing like people. People fight because when they sense they're different from someone else. Flowers just blossom. It amazes me.

I'm supposed meet with Lee-Sue today. She's male-to-female preoperative and fervently believes that if a man cuts off his penis, he somehow becomes a woman. "If you're a woman, your anatomy doesn't matter," I say, hoping to convince her to revisit her reasons for sex reassignment surgery (SRS). "Nothing matters. Not what society thinks. Not what the shrinks think. If you're a woman in mind, heart, and soul, then that's who you are. It's what you are."

Unfortunately, Lee-Sue has fallen prey to one of these Internet support newsgroups or mailing lists where transsexuals at varying levels of intelligence have convinced this poor child of God that hormones and cosmetic surgery can erase all the complexities of life as easily as a painter erases a mistake with a happy little stroke of a paint brush.

Oh, it's not that I have anything against people changing their sex, their underwear, or whatever else they want to change. In fact, I'm a fervent believer that people should use all that modern science has to offer, if it will make them happier or look a little better than they usually look. It's just that I don't believe people should be duped into making decisions that could never come near to their expectations.

Lord knows, misery loves company. And I've dealt with more than my fair share of pre-operative and post-operative bastards turned bitches to know what I'm talking about -- quite a few of them looking like Samurai wrestlers wearing miniskirts.

They still have masculine dispositions and are still perceived by most people as being male albeit penisless. And for the rest of their lives, they'll walk around labeled as transsexual, which is society's way of saying you're neither one, nor the other sex.

The truth hurts, and I have a way of speaking the truth that gets on some people's last nerve. Still, it's what a writer does, especially one with a journalistic background.

Lee-Sue asks if calling myself transgendered is any different than being called transsexual. "Some people say that if you call yourself transgendered, it just means you're not committed to changing your sex," she comments.

I reply, saying, "And some people say that if you're bisexual, you're not faithfully heterosexual, nor homosexual. But, dugh, just what does bisexual mean? It means both. So, by definition, a bisexual person is one who can enjoy being intimate with a man or a woman. Faithfulness and sexual preference are two different issues. And as for my being transgendered, the word loses a lot of significance when you've lived a quarter-century as a woman. After a while, you just think of yourself as a woman, and you're no longer trans-anything."

I've tried to make a point, but I'm not certain that Lee-Sue gets it. She continues to stare out at the traffic, possibly imagining the day she'll walk down Broad Street, surgically corrected.

"All the labels -- they can drive you crazy after a while: pre-operative, post-operative, transsexual, transgendered, stealth, passing, gender dysphoric, gender identity, male privilege, and on and on," she says. "It's like you can never be anything more than the sum total of all the labels that people stick on you."

"Well, labels are what labels do," I reply. "If you allow yourself to be defined by the labels that people put on you, then you're destined to go crazy. I'm a woman. My self-definition works for me. People can call me whatever they like. I just live according to how I've defined myself."

"I just want to put the surgery behind me," Lee-Sue replies, almost apologetically. "I just want to move on with my life."

"Well, I don't blame you for that," I answer. "I just hope the money, pain, and the risks leave you a happier and healthier human being. That's my only concern as your friend."

Lee-Sue nods approvingly.

I look at the island between the streets. Augusta is beautiful in the Spring. All the flowers -- flowers of every type, size, shape and color. I love the harmony and often wish people could live together with the same sense of harmony.