

Cravat caveat

I find romance, intellect and gentleness exciting. Like any pussycat, I can do tricks on my back and still land on all fours.

B Y L E E L Y N C H

I love wearing ties. If I had the money, I'd probably dress like something out of *GQ*. Girlfriend is delighted when I wear my brown leather flight jacket and tweed snap-brim cap. She responds by scheduling photo sessions with me — and in other more immediately gratifying ways.

I, in turn, am delighted when she gussies herself up in long skirts and exotic tops, adds a dash of eye enhancer and a dab of perfume. Now and then she'll even slip on a silky nightgown and a come-hither look, both of which affect me rather radically.

Or is *radical* the wrong word to use in these



E. Ann Hinds

spoken to by many of the women and having to fend off others. The androgyne is always a target — whether of derision or admiration or disgust. And a butch is always part androgyne, whether you can see it or only sense it.

But the fancy words are beside the point. I enjoyed dyking myself out. I'd had little occasion to do so in the past. First, because the word on the streets of New York was that one could be arrested for cross-dressing. Later, because I was shy and in an isolated relationship, so there was no place I could dress up except at home. Now the revolution was here. Women gathered in hordes all over New Haven, New York, everywhere. We were no longer bound by social codes that regulated everything from who we loved to how we dressed. Or so I thought until I put on my ties. There were discussions about trying to be like men. About scaring away the straight women. My tie collection grew. Many of the tie bashers eventually returned to heterosexual relationships. Or closets.

Here it is, 1988. Girlfriend and I wear the various costumes which explore, display and exhibit our selves. If I stand, legs apart, pelvis forward, hands outspread at pocket level — a perfectly natural position for me — Girlfriend will jump me, but other women will be scared, embarrassed or ashamed and will call our behavior something nasty . . . like "role-playing."

Is butch/femme role-playing? Sure, it's an acting out. At its most extreme it can mean adoption of rigid behaviors — kind of like being politically correct can lead to a similar rigidity. I love to diddy-bop into a room, hitch up my pants, roll up my sleeves and start to crochet. I love to come home and find Girlfriend going at a board with the electric saw which scares me to death.

I pressed Frenchy further for her comments on the diatribe.

"Listen, kid," she went on. Frenchy is six years older than me, 48 now. "One of the things I like about you is, you might be a writer, but you don't jump on any bandwagon. You talk about stuff you know. This one, it's none of her business how we conduct ourselves. I've met plenty like her, too. There's a shitload of them since the libbers started coming around. I don't know what they turn on to — maybe doing it in the mud at those music festivals — and that's OK. Just stay off of my turf."

"What would you say butch/femme is about, Frenchy?"

"Hell, what do I know? That's like asking what real life is about when you're a kid. You have to kind of feel your way." She chuckled at her play on words.

"No, seriously," I urged. "You're the expert."

"Me? An expert?" Frenchy said, feigning modesty. Briefly. "You know, you're right. If there's one thing I'm an expert at, it's being gay. But you know who else is an expert is my best drag-queen friend Mary — Mary Q. Contrary. She sees life as a — what does she call it? — courting ritual. Everybody has their own steps. Maybe some men are born nellie. Maybe

some women end up aping somebody they like: their dads, their moms, their Uncle Bert. It doesn't really matter, is what Mary-Mary says, as long as you're dancing to your own tune."

I was beginning to feel better. Not just one, but two experts were saying it's OK to be me and to be angry at a sister pervert who wants to feel less perverted than me.

"OK," I said, "now I know what Mary-Mary thinks. What about Frenchy?"

She was silent for a long moment. "Butch," she finally declared, "is knowing how to stand on a streetcorner and catch a femme's eye."

"And femme?"

"Is spotting the butch and knowing how to get her clothes off."

"But, Frenchy," I said, laughing. "I thought we were talking equality here. Are you saying the femme is the active partner?"

She chuckled again. "Don't you know that by now?"

*For two recent essays on this subject, see *Gossip* (Fall 1987; distributed by *Inland* or *Bookpeople*, \$4.50).

T H E



AMAZON
TRAIL

days when ultra-political crusaders attempt to "radicalize" us laggards by slashing at butch/femme behavior.* I am tired of reading that butch/femme is an S and M *modus vivendi*. I am not a sadist or a masochist; neither is Girlfriend. I am not particularly aggressive in any aspect of my life; she is not particularly passive. Taking power frightens me; so does giving it up. I find romance, intellect and gentleness exciting. Like any pussycat, I can do tricks on my back and still land on all fours.

For me, femme/butch is a little bit about costuming, a little bit about posing, and a lot about who and what I find attractive. It's good clean fun.

After reading yet another diatribe by a writer who doesn't seem terribly well-informed about real-life lesbians, despite all her "research," I was angry enough to need to speak with a veteran. I called Frenchy Tonneau in Greenwich Village.

Now, Frenchy has changed some since her debut in *The Swashbuckler*. She's on her own again, but she and her ex, Mercedes, are great pals. Instead of haunting the bars, Frenchy is involved in preserving Village landmarks. She's also assistant manager of a local grocery store, and at the moment she spends most of her free time with three friends who have AIDS.

So, when I called to ask her reaction to the diatribe I'd sent her, I heard in her tone that she could hardly be bothered.

"Why doesn't she go back to men if she's so scared of real dykes?" Frenchy asked.

I laughed. Here I was ready to sound off about the insulting way the writer had attempted, like so many early women's movement "thinkers," to tell me how to be what I am perfectly naturally, a lesbian. Frenchy put her in perspective in one fell swoop.

I think Frenchy struck pay dirt, too, when she used the word *fear*. My perverse desire to wear a tie (which I'm using as a symbol of the butch stance) frightens people, both straight and gay. It seems to stir up some primeval muck inside that some can't handle.

In the olden days, that is, the early '70s, I felt a lot of disapproval when I indulged in my modified drag style. I agonized over going to a party — a dyke party — in clothes that felt dressed up to me. I knew I risked not being

ROSS ISLAND
GROCERY

Thank
You

3338 sw corbett portland
227 4531

Eclectic
OPEN HANDS SALON
236-1607



METRO
HAIR DESIGN


234-1276

2008 N.E. SANDY BLVD. • PORTLAND

NEXT TIME YOU FEEL LIKE
PLAYING A ROUND..




Try a round of Cards or maybe
a round of Dominoes. Then again


there's Pigmania  for laughs,

Uno for fun . . . 221-B Baker Street


when you're feeling keenly logical . . . or

Pente and Othello when you're strategically

 inclined. Fall back on those favorites

Backgammon  and Chess or

charge ahead into  Dungeons & Dragons.

Relax with a Jigsaw Puzzle or 

meet the challenge of a Cube Puzzle.

Maybe you just feel the urge, but don't

know what to play . . . Come to the experts!

Whatever your game is, we've got it!



Endgames

Eugene Downtown
110 W. Broadway 97401
484-9846

Medford
Rogue Valley Mall
(503) 772-2116

Clackamas
Town Center
652-1434

Downtown Portland
200 S. W. Salmon 97204
224-6917