

# A Gay Day Carol

by Kate Bornstein

My editor asks me to write a piece for the parade issue of the paper. "About transsexuals," he says, "and make it upbeat."

"Sure thing, chief," I reply in my most chipper Brenda Starr manner. "One upbeat article about transsexuals comin' right up!"

Then he mutters something about a deadline, and we get off the phone. I panic.

Parade? Transsexual? Upbeat? If ever there were a triple oxymoron, this is it, I think to myself morosely and lie my head down on my desk in front of my Macintosh.

Every time I think about the Gay Day Parade, I break out in a cold sweat with the perennial question: Who am I going to march with this year? I mean, where do I fit in, anyway?

Parades! Gay Day! Transsexuals! Bah! Humbug!

Suddenly in a swirl of taffeta and tie-dye, there stands before me the betur-banded figure of none other than ... Anna Madrigal, the fictional landlady in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*.

"Of course, I'm fictional, darling," she says, as though reading my mind, "but I was real enough to persuade you to move here, wasn't I? Anyway, here I am — the Transsexual of Gay Day Past."

"Holy Dickens, Batman," I think to myself.

"Look," I say, "I know you're supposed to make me wanna like this stuff, but I just don't belong in this parade, Anna!"

Pressing a finger to my lips, she ushers me out the front door, which is now the door of the Market Street hotel I stayed in four years ago when I first moved to the city. It is a foggy, pre-dawn moment that only happens in San Francisco. Silently, and with great dignity, a parade of well, I don't know what they are, but they march.

"They're the ghosts of all the transsexuals who've come before us, darling," whispers Anna. And on they come. Hundreds of them! I spot a

shaman in skins and furs. And there's Joan of Arc! Jazz pianist Billy Tipton. San Francisco journalist Jack Bee Garland. My eyes begin to tear — here comes Christine Jorgensen arm-in-arm with Doris Fish, then Tippi and Lou Sullivan.

Shaking my head, I realize how many people had played with gender throughout history, and in how many ways!

In a flash of light, I return to my desk. There before me stands JUSTIN Bond! (Someone with VERY POOR TASTE might say she's drab, but I find her irresistibly urchinlike in her daisy-print sun dress and wide-brimmed straw hat.)

"Hey, hon," says the wraith, "I am the Transsexual of GAY Day Present!"

"But you're not a transsexual, JUSTIN," I exclaim.

"Of course not, silly," he answers. "I ENJOY being a boy who's being a girl who's being nothin' but TRASH! I'm the new wave of transsexuals, just like you're the OLD guard!"

I nod. Somehow, he's making sense.

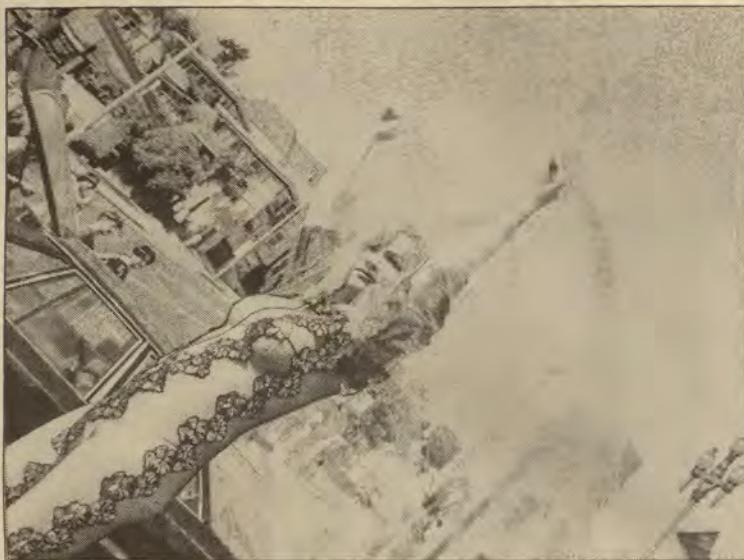
"Aw, hon, don't take it so HARD," he murmurs. "You're just not as YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL as I am, that's all. Besides, hon, what's a TRANSEXUAL, anyway?"

Well, he's made another couple of points here, and just as I am about to respond, he silences me and snaps his fingers. Suddenly, we are floating above Market Street. This year's parade is in full swing!

"See, hon, there are all kinds of SECKSHULS in this parade!"

Sure enough, there in the crowd is Robyn Scott, creator of *Homozone 5*, the amazing transgender comic book. Robyn's talking with DeAnn Oliver, Randie Flame and Michael A. Lumentu (Sable Liscious), the editorial staff of *Venus Castina*, "San Francisco's Gender Scene 'Zine." Passing in front of them is the ETVC contingent of the parade!

Kristiene Clarke, the Brit filmmaker, strolls the parade route. Sandy Stone, the transsexual academic from hell, is chatting with the editors and



Bambi, one of the many SF transsexuals who delighted me at my first parade, seen here at a more recent outdoor event. (Photo: Gideon Hirsch)

contributors of the brand-new *Lesbian Connection* "Boy or Girl?" issue on sex and gender. Leslie Feinberg, the passing woman and author of *Transgender Liberation*, is in from New York City for the weekend. Jamison Green, Omewenne, Veronica, Bambi, Christine Beatty, Anne Ogborn — there are more transsexuals than I can shake a stick at!

"You TIRED already, hon?" asks JUSTIN. "This wasn't any LATE NIGHT BENEFIT or anything," he adds archly. "Besides, if you can't find a place among these FOLKS, it's YOUR PROBLEM!" And with a drab smile, he's gone — only to be replaced by a small, genderless creature, maybe eight inches tall, wearing jeans and a white T-shirt!

"Transsexual of Gay Day Future?" I ask wearily. The creature merely nods and takes me by the hand. We're immediately flying over Market Street! This is parade day, but none like I've ever seen before! We swoop down low to get a better look.

"Can they see us?" I ask, breathless from the flight.

"Of course not," replies my guide. "Don't you know you're Dickens?"

"A surgeon took care of my Dickens," I mutter under my breath, but the creature must have heard me for he/she laughs heartily. "Besides," I say, "in Dickens, the ghost of Christmas future was big and scary!"

"Well," replies this tiny being, "if your editor hadn't said to keep it upbeat, that's exactly what I would have been. As it is, you have to look at a wonderful Parade Day Future!" So we look down at this amazing assembly.

At the head of the parade are the Dykes on Bikes. But not like any I've ever seen before. Some of these dykes have beards! Some of these dykes have dicks! "That can't be!" I sputter. We look further up the parade route. I nearly lose my balance!

Marching under a large

portrait of Jesse Helms is a group holding up a banner which reads "BETTER LATE THAN NEVER." "Who are they, and why Jesse Helms?" I ask.

"They're the Sons and Daughters of Jesse," replies my guide almost nonchalantly. "They've all come out in the last year after having led extremely homophobic lives."

"You mean to say that Jesse Helms is going to come out as a homosexual?" I ask.

"No, of course not!" snorts my guide. "But he did come out as a closet transvestite, and nearly the whole state of North Carolina now cross-dresses in tribute!"

The little one shakes its head. "See, there's a myth in our culture that says transsexuality is rare, and transsexuals are oddities," it says. "Kiddo, everyone's got gender issues of one kind or another. They could be upset with their bodies or their assigned roles in the culture or what they feel is an injustice. Back in your time, the dissatisfaction was called transsexuality."

"We've, most all of us, been dissatisfied with something about our gender," says my diminutive companion. "In the future, we do something about it, that's all. Go on now, march!"

And with that, I find myself back at my Macintosh, face down and groggy with sleep. It's dawn! Have I slept through the parade?!?!? I run to the window and throw it open — outside a young drag queen is strolling down Webster Street, wearing a Walkman.

"You there," I cry, loud enough to get through the headphones, "what day is it?" "What day is it — honey, it's Parade Day!" and she sashays down the block to some unknown '70s disco song.

And so it is Parade Day. And so, dear reader, God/Goddess Bless Us — Everyone! ▼



Transsexual, one way or another, from top: Justin Bond, Veronica Klaus, Omewenne



Film director Kristiene Clark

(Photo: Darlene/PhotoGraphics)

# "A SIMPLE MATTER OF JUSTICE"

Harvey Milk

The Bay Area Reporter Salutes the 1992 Gay/Lesbian Freedom Day Parade

## And the Winner Is ...

by Patrick D. Hoctel

Who will succeed Petuna Lambada Carnivora (Ms. Brazil) as Ms. Gay Universe 1992? While that question may not be weighing heavily on everyone's mind, you can bet the contestants for this year's title are already planning their national costumes and evening gowns and wondering what to say during the interview portion of the show.

The contest, which is sponsored by the Filipino Task Force on AIDS, is being held this year at the Palace of Fine Arts (3301 Lyon St.) on June 26 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets, which are tax deductible, can be purchased in advance from Headlines for \$15 and are \$20 at the door.

Entertainment will be provided by famed school board member Tom Ammiano, the Arcadia Bodybuilding Society and the legendary Tita Aida. "Tita," explains Rene Astudillo, coordinator for HIV Prevention and Education Ser-



vices for the task force, means aunt in Filipino and "Aida" means AIDS. He describes the drag character as a "Filipino Dear Abby" who gives advice on AIDS issues. (The co-emcee of the pageant is also the subject of a task force brochure, "Dear Tita Aida," in which, among other things, she tells a horny young man interested in blow jobs that "if your taste calls for cream, go to your nearest cafe.")

In 1990, 20 contestants vied for the coveted title won by Petuna, and \$5,000 was raised for HIV education, prevention and outreach for the Filipino community. This year's victor will take home a \$1,000 cash

prize, plus she'll ride in all her glory in the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade that Sunday, June 28. Runners-up will receive trophies. Filipino Task Force Executive Director Jaime Geaga, Astudillo and task force Coordinator of Direct Care Services Robert Samonte hope to raise \$5,000 to \$6,000 this time around.

Besides the inherent fun of and the crazy goings on at the pageant, Astudillo views Ms. Gay Universe as a "good venue for education work that's well-attended by the Filipino community." As evidence of this, he points to Tita Aida's 10-minute question-answer AIDS skit (dealing primarily with prevention and intervention), a main part of the show.

### Family Affair

Unlike drag shows in other ethnic communities, the Filipino contests are often community — and even family — affairs, with parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives rooting for their favorite. Astudillo believes that this is because in the Philippines, gay is equated with people in drag — hairdressers and dressmakers — and drag is a source of entertainment, with performers being looked up to by many in the straight community. "(Drag) beauty pageants are an accepted form of family entertainment," echoes Geaga.

Samonte stresses another factor. "The family is so important for Filipinos. That fact overrides parents' concerns, the church, or personal beliefs and opinions. The attitude is 'This is my kid, and I'm going to support him.'"

According to the three men, though, this seemingly easy acceptance of drag is definitely double-edged for Filipino gays, who number close to 30,000 in the Bay Area and around 4,000 in San Francisco itself. Since for most Filipinos gay means drag, those not into cross-dressing are not perceived as being gay and are prone to be subjects of gossip, viewed with suspicion,



Miss Gay Universe 1990 accepting her title. Who will succeed Petuna Lambada Carnivora?

unlike those in drag who are tolerated.

### Necessary Services

With the expected money from the 1992 pageant, the Filipino Task Force on AIDS, which is funded by grants from the Centers for Disease Control and the San Francisco Public Health Department, hopes to expand its services. The task force has been functioning for four years, mainly through volunteers. A full-time staff has only been in existence for a year.

Expanded services are necessary because of the high incidence of AIDS among the Filipino population. The task force's fact sheet "Filipinos and AIDS" states that "Filipinos top the list in the number of reported Asian AIDS cases in San Francisco, a trend that is duplicated on a statewide level. Of the 239 Asian and Pacific Islander (API) AIDS cases in San Francisco, 94, or 39.3 percent, are Filipino. In the entire state of California, 37 percent of 469 API AIDS cases are among Filipinos.

"Underreporting of Fil-

ipino AIDS cases is a valid concern that may mask the true incidence of the disease in the community. The fatalism, shame and denial prevalent among Filipinos may account for personal decisions to forego medical treatment in favor of secrecy or solitary confinement. The 94 reported cases may only be the tip of the iceberg ...

"Despite these statistical realities, health agencies and service providers continue to encounter cultural barriers, myths and misconceptions about the epidemic as well as behavioral patterns that run counter to current knowledge about preventing the spread of this deadly disease."

### Golden Opportunity

The task force staff sees the contest as a golden opportunity, both as a fundraiser and as a vehicle to educate in a non-threatening manner. They note that people learn better if they're having a good time.

For Astudillo, the contest's success might mean — besides more money — more safer sex small group (6-8) workshops for gay and bisexual men as well as workshops among the greater Filipino community. It could also impact the direct outreach done by the task force, such as going to bars, parties, picnics and other social functions. And, of course, more cash translates into more fliers, press releases, brochures and articles for newspapers, especially on HIV-positive Filipino men and how they're coping.

For Samonte, whose intervention work centers on helping the patient after he or she's tested positive, Ms. Gay Universe could mean more funds for support groups, one-on-one counseling, home outreach, immigration and translation, housing and emergency funds. And since the organization may be affected by the \$20-million cut the Health Department is being asked to make in its general fund, all monies are welcome.

### Further Involvement

Astudillo's and Samonte's involvement in the Filipino community extends even further to *Barangay*, the monthly year-old newsletter/zine of the Filipino gay men's group of the same name, of which they're co-editors. Recent issues have included interviews with hunky San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus member Domenic Viterbo and recent *Barangay* convert Tony Santiago, who confesses his liking for "good-looking Pinoy's." The March issue contained a thoughtful essay on family and religion by Astudillo, and naturally, Tita Aida's column is always prominently featured.

*Barangay's* co-editors describe the newsletter as a "link among the members, their only means of direct communication." For Samonte and Astudillo the 'zine provides them with a way to reach both their target population and the larger community, too, as other Filipino groups have requested copies of *Barangay* for their clients.

The Filipino Task Force on AIDS and *Barangay* have established a mutually beneficial relationship. The task force helps the men's group with certain resources (com-

## Dear Tita Aida



'Tita Aida' provides AIDS education.



## BE INFORMED INGAT LANG STAY HEALTHY

FROM DARKNESS... NEW LIFE!  
Gay Filipino Americans are among those at highest risk for AIDS.

puters, graphics, office space, etc.) and in return, the group allows the task force access to their soirees, like the hugely successful Thanksgiving and Christmas parties. All in all, a sterling example of the "you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours" school. Such cooperation among the task force staff, contest organizers and *Barangay* members has helped make the Filipino gay community much more visible in the larger and incredibly diverse San Francisco gay community, not to mention a force to be reckoned with. ▼



FILIPINO  
MEN  
ON  
FILIPINO  
MEN

Interview with  
Domenic Viterbo  
& Tony Santiago

FEBRUARY 1992  
BARANGAY



March 1992

ANNIVERSARY

BARANGAY  
SAN FRANCISCO

*Barangay* is the monthly magazine of the Filipino gay male community.