

ONE STEP BEYOND

by **Lynnell S. Long**

Fear of Rejection

Transsexuality & Femininity

"I am who I am / what I am and shall be / a Black Lesbian Femme / top to bottom that's me." — C.C. Carter (from her *Many Phases of Womanhood*)

If you ask most transsexuals what they believe to be the process for transitioning, I'm sure most will say it is to be the most feminine woman alive. There are some transsexuals and crossdressers who model themselves after other women. They act, dress, walk, and talk how they believe women behave. I'm not criticizing anyone—on the contrary, I'm just acknowledging their process. However, I believe the process of transitioning is to be yourself and let nature take its course. It's impossible to force something like femininity. Either you're feminine or you're not. There is



no contest to see who's the best Femme. There are many types of femininity: Aggressive femme and Dominant femme, just to name a couple. I feel there is something I should state here and now for the transsexuals just coming out. Don't let anyone tell you you're not a woman because you don't wear make-up, or dresses, or don't laugh softly. Look around you and you will see not all woman wear make-up, dresses, and all that other stuff society says women do. I rarely wear make-up, and when I do it's to enhance my natural beauty, not to look like a drag queen. If you're just coming out, hang around lesbians, like I do. There you will most clearly see the differ-

ent types of women.

The subject Femininity is a touchy subject to most transsexuals, including myself. There was a time I fought against every feminine bone and muscle in my body. I was raised in a single-parent home, and my mother was very dominant. She had to be to raise 8 kids: 5 boys and 3 girls, including myself. I thought femininity was a sign of weakness. I didn't want to seem weak and submissive, so I decided to be butch, even if it hurt. There were many ways I carried on the facade of being butch. Although I am a leather-woman, and love S/M, I used that look to portray myself to the world as a butch dyke. It wasn't just the look, it was my attitude, as well. Whenever I went out on a date, I was the butch. I never allowed anyone to know the real Lynnell, the woman that just wanted to be held and loved; instead, I played the dominant one. It took a REAL dominant leather-woman to help me stop pretending, to help me get over

that lie that feminine women are weak. I started to see the power in femininity. I love the way men, as well as butch lesbians, practically break their necks whenever a feminine woman walks by. I can't say for sure when I started accepting my femininity. It was sometime in the past year. I found myself relaxing more and allowing my feminine energy to overtake me. Wearing skirts and dresses no longer felt uncomfortable.

Femininity isn't a prerequisite to being a woman, nor is it a prerequisite to being a male-to-female transsexual. I'm sure most psychologists will say that, during a transsexual's transition, the ideal transsexual will become a submissive, quiet, feminine woman, and blend into society. I could blend into society easily, but I would rather not. I have too much fun writing, performing, and giving speeches. Besides, my mission is to erase the old stereotypical views people had about transsexuals and take you, my readers, One Step Beyond.

Up Close & Personal

by **Lynnell S. Long**

Flame Monroe, 1996 Miss Black Universe

"Flame Monroe is a person that's true to herself, cuts no corners, she doesn't bite her tongue, doesn't kiss any ass unless it's a meaningful ass. It has to be a meaningful ass, an ass that's going to help me climb at least one or two steps in this ladder of life that we call success," says Flame Monroe.

Monroe, a 30-year-old entertainer, radio personality for V103, and self-proclaimed world-renowned Diva, is title holder of 1996 Miss Black Universe. "My first time [entering Miss Black America] I won, it was an honest and fair pageant. Those kids up there [in Atlanta] if they don't know you, they do not clap for you; they did not clap for me. I won because I was the best. I was together, my mind was right, I stayed focused on what I had to do, and I won," she said.

During the 1996 Miss Continental pageant, Flame said she was told by the owner of the Baton, Jim Flint, that if she did her comedy routine, she would have a hard time placing in the top 12. Flame came out and I was told she rocked the crowd with her comedy, but she did not place in the top 12. This is what she had to say about that incident: "Jim Flint does not think that comedy is a talent. No one realizes how hard it is to make people laugh, especially your own peers. It's harder

to please your peers and everyone knows this. He [Jim Flint] told me if I didn't use profanity I would make the top 12. I told him he's not the judge, he just owns the contest,



Flame Monroe

and that's not judging me fairly. I came out and I said that there's a discrepancy in my talent and I was told I should do this and I should do that. But I have to be me, I'm true to myself, and I have to be who I am. I stood the entire place on their feet, the entire place, by myself. ... When they didn't call my name [for the top 12], I stepped through the girls that was already lined up and walked up the middle of the runway ... snapped my fingers at Jim and jumped off the stage." Monroe

feels she and others were treated unfairly, and now she said she's banned from the Baton Show Lounge.

"Unless you have blond hair and white skin, [some folks in this industry think] you're no one, or nothing. I'm not blond haired and I'm not white skinned, and I'm not going to sell out. I'm very proud to be a Black woman," says Flame Monroe. "My definition of a woman is Flame Monroe. ... A woman is someone who's comfortable with herself, comfortable being around other people, she's sure of herself. A lot of girls, especially female illusionists, think that being a woman is putting on make-up. I think being a woman is something you feel on the inside, feel from your heart, and I feel like a woman.

"I don't want to be just stuck [as a] female illusionist—I'm also a comedian. I go to the straight clubs and turn out the house. Being a comedian is not about ragging on people, it's about having a situation. ... The things that are more funny than anything are true to life things, things that have really happened to you, you just turn them around in a funny kind of way," said Flame.

What's in Monroe's future? "Great success, I'm going to always be a comedian and female illusionist. I'm going to put my iron in every fire I can. I'm going to try everything—you never know what's going to get you in the door," said the "Diva."

BLACK

LINES

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Bayard Rustin: The Troubles He Saw

New book takes a look at this civil-rights pioneer. See pg. 16.

Pictured: Bayard Rustin (right) with South African Bishop Desmond Tutu. Also: The 1963 March on Washington, which Rustin helped organize.



Standing (Ovation) Room Only

Writer C.C. Carter had them cheering for more during her recent performance at the BLACKLINES anniversary. See pg. 18. Photo: Patrick Robinson

INSIDE ...

Unity Conference, page 12.

Flame Monroe, page 24.

Views on Mother's Day, School Proms, Cult Suicides, page 22.

Minority AIDS Project, page 9.

Poetry ... Poetry ... Poetry, page 26.

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