

Name amended to read Rollerena
Monday

Roller-Arena at Bloomy's

The side door at 59th Street is the uses. Steps are easy: she pulls up her skirt and ascends with grace.

"I just want to make the rounds and talk with some of the girls," she says, as she skates in, her back arched, her butterfly glasses making her look like Slim Summerville playing Glinda. She stops at the Halston counter, blessing the clerks with her baton. "I'm going to the Yankee's party at Studio 54," she confides to the girls at Cinique.

Two security guards stop her. They claim she knocked over a customer. They lie. She insists she didn't—and she didn't. The floor manager is summoned. He tells Roller-Arena that she is not to skate on the rugs or use the escalator. He is officious. "I saw you skate on Third Avenue once," he says. "I saw you do some really lovely steps." He continues with innuendos about Roller-Arena's femininity.

Insults from jerks deserve serious replies. Remarks about the tooth fairy are sweetly rebuffed by Roller-Arena. "I'm very concerned about my social standing in the community," she retorts. "I was an All-American soldier in Vietnam, and I protected this store from communism."

A crowd gathers. A few onlookers shake their heads in disbelief, but most are amused. Roller-Arena autographs a perfume card for one of the toughies who had stopped her: "To Tony, from a real man rolling your way." She reminds the floor manager that in 1973, she entered the Macy's parade on the Vanilla float. Behind the perfume counter, a woman confides that she has known Roller-Arena since 1970 when he was wearing a propeller on his head.

He. One doesn't call Roller-Arena he. She doesn't think of herself as a drag queen. Actually, she'd prefer to be called *that person*.

That person is a skating Rorschach test. How you view Roller-Arena is how you judge the world. The floor manager judges her snidely and continues his low-keyed tirade.

"Why is your dress so dirty?" he asks Roller-Arena.

"I wash my dress once a year, whether it needs it or not."

"Your yeag is up," he snaps.

Suddenly, a beep blurps inside the manager's jacket. Roller-Arena wonders if she's being tape recorded.

The manager heads towards stationery. Roller-Arena rolls towards Harry's Bar. She remarks that the president of Bloomy's once told her that she has a responsible position in the community. No elaboration on that responsibility. Could it be that Roller-Arena is as indigenous to New York as Bloomy's?

She descends the 59th Street stairs, regally, like Lana Turner in *Ziegfeld Girl*, and skates to the Pepsi-Cola building. Bloomy's should be ashamed of themselves.

Roller-Arena at the Joan Crawford Building

"It takes lots of practice, control, overcoming the fear of falling, public opinion..." claims Roller-Arena as a cab driver stops short and breaks into hysterics. "I remind him of a loved one."

She is now demonstrating at the plaza of the building she calls the Joan Crawford building. She executes a pirouette with flourish, ending in a dip. "Some people mistake me for the reincarnation of Sonja Henie," she whispers. Her skirt goes to her shins and she breaks into a heel spin. "I use my arms and

shoulders to twist myself. Do you like it?" A backward prance follows, after which she kicks up her left foot elegantly into the air, then whirls about, ending in a curtsy. "I don't go too far down. You can't catch anything like this at the Met."

Roller-Arena finishes each routine with a honk of the horn that's tied around her waist, thereby shattering any implication of self-importance and adding a new meaning to art. A visiting Lebanese dignitary comes upon the scene. His jaw drops. "Excuse me, sir,"

Arthur Bell Profiles Roller-Arena



JAMES HAMILTON

51 Roller-Arena at Bloomy's—The skate queen makes her rounds, gracefully protecting gapers from the spectre of communism. (Arthur Bell)

apologizes Roller-Arena. "Has your upbringing prepared you for this?" The diplomat suddenly smiles. This is an impression of America he will bring back home.

Roller-Arena decides it's time to leave. She stops in front of a mirror and primps. During the evening, there are several mirror stops. At a floor-length job near S. Cohen, Opticians, she admonishes her reflection. "I couldn't face my own sister for the evil I saw in myself. Frash has to be outlawed, but the show must go on." It's all very Joan Crawford.

Roller-Arena at Serendipity

Serendipity is one of Roller-Arena's drop-off points. More often than not, Roller-Arena leaves her Yorkville, rent-controlled flat dressed straight, and does her Shazam num-

ber in assorted secretive rooms enroute to her final destination, be it Rockefeller Center, Wall Street, or Christopher. Not every night of the week is she Roller-Arena. Without get-up, he's a blue-eyed, 5'11", 128 pound, 30-year-old ex-hillbilly from

Gravelsnatch, Kentucky, who wears his long hair in braids for work, walks the Village streets, and drinks at Julius's. Both on and off skates, the voice is nasal-twangy, and the manner that of Minnie Pearl. But Roller-Arena is sharp. She knows exactly what she's doing. She orders a salad plate and reminisces about "the first time."

"Late in '69," she says, "there was a threat of a subway strike. I was working for a Wall Street company: they were arranging car pick-ups—very complicated—and I thought, 'Oh, I'll roller-skate to work.' Well, the strike never did come off, but one hot day in the summer of '70, I was in the subway, hating it, sweating in my jacket, and I knew the time was ripe. Not only would I skate to work, but I'd find an identity."

"So I started rolling overnight and people were instantly drawn to me. I was being photographed and admired. Crowds would congregate. What was important is that most in-

dividuals were relating to me in a positive way. They liked what I had created."

Roller-Arena professes to take her wheel persona seriously. She is self-fulfilled, happy. Also, wise. She wouldn't consider skating in Little Italy or Brooklyn and is extremely wary of teenagers. Her skateathons are limited to well-heeled neighborhoods, gay spots, and chic haunts.

In Serendipity, she's perfectly at home. She describes her outfit. "The gown is a chiffon fantasy, ballerina length, with green crinoline underneath. A basic white T-shirt covers my chest and I wear a little sash around the neck. Keys are to the left, indicating that there's a real man skating your way. My horn, though, is on the right, to let people know I'm coming through. Red, white, and blue stockings nearly cover my knees. Very American. The skate key around my neck is basic and the skates have Douglas Snyder plates beneath a Rydell girl's racing boot, dyed black."

Even the Serendipity waiters know of Roller-Arena's dingleberry ring. "More tongues

have kissed it than the Pope's," she admits, after it gets a rousing smack from a beautiful young man. The wrist corsage is a relatively new acquisition which Roller-Arena got at the *Grease* party at Studio 54, and the rhinestone bird earrings are worn with beaks pointed downward.

Roller-Arena's classiest bit of apparel is her hat. She owns twenty-five. They all have names. Today, it's Autumn Leaves.

Like most pioneer women, she doesn't curse, drink, smoke, or wear makeup, and is just a little too bossy. Like most closeted men, she is fearful about the possibility of discovery at the large corporation where she works. Only a handful of workers know.

"I'm not schizophrenic," she sighs, "and I relate to people without the costume the same as I do with."

But then there's that horn.