

I

On some days I cause what I like to call 'restroom chaos'.

Early one morning at a conference I stand before a mirror in a university washroom, trying to find the lucidity to present a paper. An old male professor wanders in, cries out "I am so sorry, miss!" and runs out of the room. Unfortunately, having exhausted one of the options available within society's suspect binary, his panicked brain takes him straight into the "women's" washroom. I listen to the ensuing shrieking and sigh. Gender in our society is still tightly controlled; "it's a boy" or "it's a girl" are still the only two cries to escape a doctor's lips as we squirm into this confusing world. For those of us who do not fit this model, bathroom politics are a reality of everyday survival, even early in the morning before coffee brings caution.

II

As young children Jo-Anne and I tied Ken to a tree and made Barbie and Skipper drive away in the Corvette together. They parked by the water's edge, and were found kissing energetically by my first grade teacher. My mother, I am sure, got yet another call.

My father always bought me very cool toys. Tonka bulldozers, dump trucks, toy chainsaws. I even had a Fisher Price off-shore oil platform. I loved them all, and when Jo-Anne's sister took away the Corvette, Barbie and Skipper drove off together in my Tonka Road Grader. The gender clinic assures my mother that none of these things contributed to my eventual identity as a lesbian woman and an environmentalist. I think of Jo-Anne sometimes, and wonder if she ever wakes up with a strange desire to own a pink corvette.

III

Society does not always leave space for dissent.

The wind blowing down the Don valley is strong and the moonlight glistens off of the water. Perhaps I am out for a walk, getting some air. Maybe I am taking a break from the monotony of writing. Certainly the debris of the thesis creation process fills my apartment. I have been eating delivered pizza for days. Maybe I am just out for a walk.

Or maybe my soul is so tired from pretending, so tired of every 'mister' and 'sir' that I am pacing out to mid-span to place one foot against the stone railing and then leap up and for a moment balance in the moonlit space between future and ending.

Maybe I got help shortly after that evening. Sometimes though, I wonder if I jumped. The last three years could just be the dream during the fall.

IV

If socially constructed boundaries are to remain sharp within nature's shadowlands, we must appoint gatekeepers. I have met several as I traverse the space between society's binary poles; they dwell in towers of steel and stone and glass and wield files as they would a cruel blade.

She will always be known as the woman with bad lipstick. We use the name when we gather, looking over our shoulders, shivering. The woman with bad lipstick stares at me for the first few moments of our interview, evaluating me as I try to control my fear. She once told a friend of mine that he was not transgendered but that he should have a hysterectomy if he didn't like bleeding. She is notoriously picky about who she feels can colour outside of society's lines. She rejects people on the grounds of their career, on the grounds of their lovers. And now it is my turn; she strips me naked and circles me, her shivering sacrifice.

excerpts from a notebook

by Lenore Newman

She begins her physical assessment. My chin is too long, my nose too big. I should consider surgery. My hands are pleasingly small, though scarred by my years of physical labour in the timber industry. She is thrilled by my hairless body. My height is workable, and my weight adequate. My voice, she concludes, is better than most. She grabs my genitals and tells me my body piercings are ugly, unladylike.

Psychologically, she agrees that I do not fit the box assigned me at birth. I will be allowed to occupy the other box if I am willing to follow the shortest and most direct path through the badlands. The middle ground, she makes clear, is strictly off limits. I suppose I am fortunate to live when I do; even ten years ago I would have been denied help because I am a dyke. Now it just adds a word to my official status: type two transsexual, gynophilic. As I dress and she ushers me out of her office she puts a hand on my shoulder and offers a little advice:

“Get the surgery as soon as you can dear. You need to know where you stand.”

I gather up my potential and my inadequate body parts and stop at the door. I don't know that I want to face major surgery. I add her advice to that of another of the gatekeepers:

“Don't sit on the fence. You don't need a transgender community. You can be a woman, just another woman.”

V

Transgendered people are commonly found in two places in society. First, in the headlines: another transgendered soul murdered for crossing society's lines. These stories make me cry with anger. Often the mainstream media justifies the crime, reporting how the transgendered person was flirting, pretending to be a 'boy' or a 'girl'. In some states we can be legally killed under 'panic defense' laws. The message is clear; survival depends on hiding, and denying who we are.

I find our other presence just as disturbing. She-male porn is one of the most popular types of adult entertainment. I surf the net out of morbid curiosity, pulling up sites with names like 'shemaleyum' and watch the screen fill with images of people like me. I often wonder who it is that looks at this porn, and why the idea of breasts and cock together so turns them on. And if we are so valuable as sexual objects why must we live in fear? If they want to fuck us, why do they kill us?

VI

A whisper of change grows, a wind blowing out of the shadows. There are cracks in their binary. Through these cracks step uncounted transgender folk and those who stand by them. Through these rifts step the army of the intersexed, one born every day in every major city, I am told. Through holes in this 'his and her' conception of the human race step the other sexes, The XXY and XYY and XO. In the same season that the new conservative government in British Columbia closes the only gender clinic in the West the North West Territories becomes the first place in North America to include transgendered people in its hate crime legislation. Everywhere in the badlands I see the tracks of those who have walked this path before me, those who dared to cross a much deeper divide or even dwell in the between spaces, people who make my journey possible, and trivial compared to their own. When I meet them they are good to me, so very giving, despite all of the trials and abuse they have endured. All around me the whisper grows, voices wearing away at social constructions and bringing change.

VII

Society's categories are strong in the towns near the wilderness but after driving endless miles of baking road in an overheated and mudcaked car (Mustang, not Corvette), I am finally beyond watching eyes. I let the waters of Hecate strait wash my bare feet as I stand alone with my lover on a grand swath of beach nestled in a rocky bay. Eagles played overhead, eagles and ravens. Who knew there were so many birds left in the world?

I walk in the watery sunlight, naked to the world, breasts and cock exposed to the wind, unbound and unjudged.