

## Transuming Conformity

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*transume:*

\Tran\*sume", v. t. [L. transumere, transsumere, to take from one to another; trans across + sumere to take.] To change; to convert.

It was so simple on paper, but to you it was the stuff of fantasies. Someday you would be at a restaurant, and the server would say, "Are you ready to order, Miss?" Then you'd go to the restroom, choosing without hesitation the stick figure with the triangle. As you entered another woman would exit, and your eyes would meet for a split second. She would continue on her way, not giving you another look, even if you were (inevitably) a few inches taller than her, or you could never quite hide that quarterback torso. She would pay these things no mind, for your countenance would be female. Unconscious of the fact that she was doing it at all, she would grant you passage.

This desire was at the core of who you were, of what you needed just to be sane, never mind happy. You came out as transsexual and started hormones and electrolysis. The changes were slower than you would have liked, but eventually the day arrived that you looked at a boy and saw a species truly other than your own. You felt a profound sense of relief, along with the surreal, transcendent thought of *that's not me. i'm a girl now*. It was the feeling of an impossible, lifelong dream made flesh.

Hanging around the San Francisco queer scene, you observed that Female-to-Males outnumbered Male-to-Females by at least five to one. You had to laugh, because you knew that according to conventional wisdom, M2Fs comprised the larger flock. F2Ms were a lot less noticeable to the untrained eye, probably

because the genetic female face and body usually has a much higher potential for androgyny than the male.

You became familiar with the concept of the non-op/noho-nolo tranny: one who eschews any sort of hormones or surgery, preferring to remain unaltered physically while still living in their chosen gender--or lack thereof. Which was where genderqueer came in, those who rejected notions of male and female altogether. You noticed this group was far more likely to be *genetic* female by birth. (With some notable exceptions, of course. There were exceptions to everything.)

Across the board, but particularly from the genderqueer sector, there was an unmistakable hatred of the so-called binary gender system. It was viewed as repressive and restricting. Personally, you'd never felt so free as when you traded the male for the female role. In fact, it didn't feel so much like a trade as a liberation.

After transitioning, after changing what most people saw as the most basic and immutable factor of identity and role, the sky was the goddamned limit. You could start from scratch, be whatever you wanted. You were not beholden to anyone's rules or preconceptions about who you should be. All the other queers and trannies felt the same way about themselves, right?

Aside from becoming more brave and confident as your body and mind finally started getting in sync, your behavior and personality didn't change dramatically, nor did you ever feel like you were playing a role. You didn't need to. Though not effeminate or overtly femmey, you were never much of a boy to begin with. Body be damned, you were always a girl.

Except that now there seemed to be something wrong with that. By considering yourself female, you were buying into the gender binary. This, you were informed, was a bad thing.

Not to your face, of course. Nobody was so rude as that. Well, mostly; at an open mic, you read an emotionally vulnerable piece about your body image, discussing your desire to be thin and tying it in with your gender issues. The host then did damage control, as if to clear the air after you'd sullied it with your non-canonical thoughts. They essentially described you as being brainwashed by the patriarchy, the media's beauty standards, and, of course, the binary gender system. And you'd just thought you wanted to be thin.

Some plus-sized girls walked out in protest when you read the piece elsewhere, not realizing that your demons were too busy with *you* to give a shit about *them*. You were out as a trans person, but evidently that wasn't enough to keep you from being a counterrevolutionary assimilationist sellout. You had to adopt a prescribed, party-approved sense of aesthetics as well. You weren't straight anymore, but much to your surprise, you were still expected to be narrow. It was just a different ledge.

As if wanting to be thin wasn't bad enough, the desire to pass was almost regarded as an act of oppression. An F2M friend (who claimed not to care what people thought of him yet bristled visibly when called "she") asked you passionately if rhetorically over dinner one night, "Why should anyone have to pass? And what if they don't? Does that mean they've failed? How fucked up is that?" You agreed that it was highly fucked up, declining to mention that in this context you thought of the word "pass" in terms of motion and movement rather than success or failure. But hey, everyone's entitled to their metaphors, even if they aren't so free to choose their own bodies.

You couldn't help but notice that the people most vocally opposed to the concept of passing were born female, and not likely to have been as emotionally brutalized by society's scorn of all things transgender. They were emotionally brutalized by a hell of a lot of other things--the threat of rape was a new element in your life--but they couldn't have felt as targeted as you did by seeing the barrage of media images of M2F transsexuals and transvestites as creatures to be mocked and laughed at. In America, nothing is funnier than a man in a dress.

The abolition of gender sounded like a noble goal, but it seemed about as likely to happen in your lifetime as the return of Christ. You couldn't ignore the reality of the street *now*, where people would frequently point and laugh and say "That's a guy!" You didn't have the luxury of being above it all. If attempting to pass meant you were the Vichy France of World War Gender, so be it.

You wished you didn't mind. Occasionally you even tried telling yourself that from now on you'd try to be more evolved and progressive, that it was okay to be called "he." Except that went against who you were. You respected the hell out of the folks who didn't care, but your own attempt at not caring worked about as well as when, pre-transition, you told yourself you were going to accept how things were and be happy as a boy. The denial of self had been too much.

That you got clocked by Norms made it sting all the more when other queers intentionally referred to you by the male pronoun. Hurt every time, but at least you didn't have to worry about it being followed by physical violence. But why would an ally do such a thing? You wondered if since a genetic female with short hair and boys' clothing did not necessarily want to be called "he," then it followed that a genetic male with long hair in women's clothing did not necessarily want to be called "she," so those people decided to err on what they mistook to be the side of caution. Then again, maybe you were giving them too much credit, and they were simply being ignorant or even deliberately hostile. The problem was, there was no way to tell--and in that initial moment of pain, that emotional kick in

the teeth, it sure felt like hostility. If Janice Raymond were dead, her ghost would be having a good laugh.

So one day found yourself visiting your girlfriend's family in the Midwest. The weirdest thing happened: you passed. At the grocery store in rural Kansas with your girlfriend's grandfather, the Omaha mall or even an equidistant Wal-Mart in Assram, Nebraska, nobody gave you a second look. If they did, they certainly didn't stare like people did back home. Everyone used the female pronoun and defaulted to "miss" or "ma'am."

It was as though these places, with all their solid Midwestern values, Republican voting record and xtian man-on-top-get-it-over-with-quick sexual mores couldn't begin to conceive that a real live transsexual might be in their midst, so they looked at your clothes and makeup and hair and parsed you as a girl, no questions asked. In San Francisco, the Norms knew you were around and probably prided themselves on spotting you; in the Central Time Zone, they didn't know you existed. Was it somehow *safer* in Flyover Land?

Of course it wasn't, and you couldn't be happier to return to your beloved Queer Mecca. You just hadn't anticipated how invisible you would be in the Midwest. You also knew the peculiar invisibility wouldn't last. If you tried to live out there...well, there were some who did, and you admired their courage. Brandon Teena sure gave it the ol' college try.

No, your home was San Francisco, even if sometimes it tried so hard to be progressive at all costs, it circled back around to reactionary. Everyone has their way of trying to make the world into what *they* think it should be. And so do you. You know that the only truly revolutionary, transformative act is to be yourself, no matter what the community thinks.



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