

# TORCHSINGER

April Miller,

*Sultry red spotlight slowly rises to disclose a voluptuously fat female standing center stage wearing a clingy, full-length, red velvet dress. She slowly draws a sheer gold scarf across her breasts and belly, then drops it to the floor and addresses the audience.*

**Sexy, huh? Pause.**

**Lights.**

*She drops her pose. Glaring white lights come up suddenly.*

**I'm happy to say that I won't be singing tonight.**

After the last Femme Show I realized that there were some things about *my* femme experience that I really wanted to talk about, and I swore that if I got the chance again I'd say them. **Voila!** Death on Heels 2: the femmes return. This is clearly my second chance, so if I'd sung tonight it would have been a cop-out. I try really hard not to do that.

I think that most of you don't have the slightest idea of what it's like to live as a truly fat woman in America. Or what it was like, for me, to be a fat kid. I doubt you've ever even thought about it. So I'm going to tell you.

Being fat means fighting for your life in a battle against every single thin person in the world—and most of the fat ones, too—all of you on one side, and me on the other. It means being everybody's favorite victim, their easiest target, and their worst threat. It means going through life praying that everyone will ignore me. That I'll be invisible. That they'll leave me alone. 'Cause if they notice you, they'll hurt you.

Have you ever thought about the fact that at the other end of every fat-hating comment you have ever heard, or made—

"Fatty fatty two-by-four, can't get through the kitchen door!" "I've **got** to get to the gym this week or I'll blow up like a balloon!" "Billy's got a crush on April! Billy's got a crush on April!"

—there's a target: Me.

Or some fat woman just like me.

"No ifs or ands, just one big butt!"

That's me. Bertha big butt.

I've read and heard a lot of things that imply that it's *easy* to be femme. Apparently all you have to do is to lay back on a tide of societal pressure and get carried off to a rose-colored land of lipstick and mystery dates. I only wish it were that easy. You know how thin little girls get told they're *so* pretty, and they're going to be *beautiful* when they grow up, and do they have a boyfriend yet? I got told it was such a shame. I had such a pretty face...

As I was working on this piece I wrote a lot about the sexual attention—abuse—I received and survived as a child. That writing made me realize that there was nothing special in all my experiences, nothing to distinguish them from things which happened to any of

you. Except this: those disgusting and terrifying 30 and 40 and 60 year old men who would offer to give me money and presents if I would be "nice" to them were also the only indication I had that my body was not too disgusting to be desired. Can you imagine the horror of being *grateful* to a bunch of would-be baby-rapers for giving you a sense of self-worth?

I meet a lot of people who seem to think that: A) I've got some kind of special dispensation from God that makes *my* world supportive and insult-free so that I can be the kind of sexy fat femme that they could never even *dream* of being. B) I must be sexually available—I show off my tits!—and incredibly stupid. Because everyone knows that fat is disgusting and no fat person could possibly love their body. Or else, C) I'm not fat! People actually say that to me, "Oh, April, You're not fat!" Right.

See, when it comes to the games of happiness, and femme-ininity, and desirability, and power, fat girls aren't allowed to play. The most we get is to sit up in the nose-bleed section and watch. For motivation.

I want you to know that I have had to fight—like a fat girl—for every shred of the poise, self-respect and glamour that you see in me. My entire experience with having femininity thrust upon me consists of being given Bonne Bell samples in my teenage weight-loss group by the counselor who came in "to show you how to put on make-up for all those dates you're going to go on when you're thin!" And my experience of heterosexual privilege is the dejected, angry, wistful feelings I get as I turn down phone numbers and offers of coffee from what appear to be perfectly nice men because, as I tell them, "I'm a lesbian. I don't do men."

Not that I "do" many women either.

When you have a body like mine you're either dogshit or a sex object. I am the kind of femme I am largely because I learned to use my sexuality as a way to keep men in their place. "Look, but don't touch." Funny, I'm a femme dyke who actually *likes* butches, and likes to have sex with butches—at least sometimes—but I'd rather be leered at by straight men. Because at least *\*they\** know how to keep their hands off.

The confidence I project is fueled by a *\*fuck-you\** bonfire in my soul that's trying to turn a lifetime of humiliation into ashes. And the supreme irony of my participating in this glorious expression of femme solidarity is that I know perfectly well that the glamorous, self-loving, sensual, vivid fat girl that I have to work so hard to continue to be is the personification of your worst nightmares.

"Just shoot me if I ever get that fat, OK?"

**BLACKOUT**★

This piece was performed in San Francisco, CA in December, 1994