

# blue floral gusset



My now ex-psychologist asked me a couple of years ago whether I taped my cock to my legs before getting dressed. He'd had a few transvestite clients before, and that's apparently what they did to avoid getting read as male. I freaked out at the idea pretty quickly. I was probably complaining about the difficulty in finding skirts that don't hug me in the crotch, so his response wasn't out of line. But I'm hairy - pretty damn hairy. For all my anger over the vicious social enforcement of body hair grooming norms, there was (and still is) no damn way you're gonna see the merest wispy whisker from my shaggy thighs.

Therefore, the thought of having a piece of gaffa slowly tearing my foreskin and upper-inner thigh hair off as I try to calmly stride around answering peoples questions at work in the library made me do a little tortured fairy scream in my brain stem.

Back then, I was still a pretty... um, I mean a fairly closetted transvestite - nothing more obvious than girls pants 'n blouses. Now, about two years later, I'm a full-time skirtathon, almost to the point of getting rid of my few remaining pants.

It's kind of awesome, really - been wanting to get out into the world this way for the better part of a decade - but it's also pretty mundane and domestic. I'm rarely "Do I have the guts to wear that pin-stripe number to work?" anymore - just "Will this need anti-static spray, and will it cover my hairy-hairy midriff?"

Anxieties of some description are there, at least - so that's good. No reason to fully freak out.

For all my theorising over the last decade about what it is to be a transvestite, it's only really been in the last few months in which I've been living it out that some kind of workable philosophy has come about in me. It's a very small scale thing, but it guides my daily journeys like a fierce magnet forged of stone and tulle. One of my main worries about my identity over the last few years has been that my identity was a purely superficial one,

and hence not something to get too politically fired up about - it's just clothes, right? But as I've found my way through all different kinds of fabric, leg-wear, make-up, and shoe types, I've realised how important it is to feel comfortable in my own body. I've often avoided reading up on the thoughts and experiences of transgendered people due to what I felt was a lack of any significant gender dysphoria in me, though now I'm starting to see where so many similarities in my experiences lie. I may not crave surgery or hormone replacement therapy or even to have people switch pro-nouns when referring to me, but my body's still a complicated and wonderful mess of a building to live in, and it deserves a bit of thought and care as to how it swims through my life.

Like Darwin, for example. Pretty soon, I'll be venturing up there for the first time, and I'm almost freaking out about it. Not because of the small-city-local-redneck factor, but because of my legs. Judging on the pictures on the web-site of the hotel I'll be staying at, there's just generally a whole lot of less that goes on up there. Shorts, bikinis, skin, thongs, skin... ah.

I've never visited the Northern Territory before, and haven't been that far north in Australia since the 80s. It's a work thing - a few days at a conference, near the end of which I'll be delivering a paper, then back home to Melbourne in time for an awesome extreme metal gig. There's a few things making me edgy about the visit, and most of them are quite superficial. The annoying issue stems from the climate - a type of weather I've not quite experienced yet in my life. Not long after my trip was fully locked in, I decided that I would have to forgo my usual tights/leggings leg-wear. Then... I'd probably have to shave my legs.

There's a lot of baggage surrounding that "have to". Since just before June this year, I've gone completely skirt-y - skirt-y to work, skirt-y at home, skirt-y to pubs, and even skirt-y around my parents (I'll choose to avoid that particular anecdote for this zine). I've identified as a transvestite (non-fetishistic,

male-identifying, cis-gendered, for those who are curious) for over a decade, though various fears and insecurities have lead to me keeping that fairly well hidden for much of that time. Last year I wrote a zine called 'Travesty', in which I tried to sum up my growing understanding of this particular gender identity, mixing it up with an at times conflicting love of extreme metal music. Like an unfortunately large number of my zines, it was rushed and thus felt incomplete. I tried making it into a serial to give myself the space to flesh out the ideas, but that fared even worse than the first. Now, though, I think I understand why.

Back then, aside from occasional dress-up evenings - when my outfits felt more like the uncomfortable and staged aspects of drag attire than the comfortable ideal I desired - and confident make-up wearing days, most of my understanding of how I mixed amidst and approached the world as a transvestite were very internalised and theoretical. A few ugly encounters with thugs nearly a decade ago now brought a highly debilitating fear of fully outing myself in public.

Often the thought of wearing a skirt in public was enough to bring sickening nerves up through my stomach, stopping somewhere around my neck until I managed to distract myself. Despite believing that a tough “fuck-'em” approach was the best way to force myself - and, more importantly, those that saw and met me in public - to accept it, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I'm not strong; I have no self-defence skills. Things seemed mounted against me - 'things' became more and more real to me. It seemed hopeless.

But now, my main concern is that I'll have to go through the annoying shit that is 'having to shame my legs'. Part of me is still wondering (sort of) what the hell happened, but the larger, thankfully more convincing part of me is smiling and saying "I don't care". Enough positive things - transvestite metalhead comedians, compassionate and understanding lovers, down to earth housemates, awesome new vegan boots - contributed to some kind of greater whole that transpired in close enough

proximity to one another for me to go...

"Okay." In part, my theorising self has stepped back, put down his binoculars, and decided to walk up the mountain a bit. The politics and ideals I've held for years now have also stepped back a bit. I remember a friend of mine said something a few years ago when we were talking about queer activism, and fighting for a life you want to live. The thing that can too easily be overlooked, he said, is that after a while, you just have to live it. The last few months, I think, have been about my life outside of theory.

A few days after starting to wear skirts more-or-less full-time (literally, at the time - that is, I wore pants on weekends), I was due to get my annual flu injection at work. I'm not a huge fan of needles - I imagine the aversion comes from the same place as my hatred of ticks, and... well, anything that's *raison d'etre* involves inserting a significant part of itself under your skin - so... my hands were a bit clammy. It was also, probably, the first medical visit I'd attended in a skirt.

When it was my turn to get punctured, I sat down straight away and rolled up my left sleeve. The nurse who was to administer the stuff paused a bit, which made me a bit more anxious. I stuttered, "I'm right handed, so... left arm, right?" She kept pausing, inserting an "um" or two as she sat down next to me. She then very gently went about explaining how getting an injection in ones upper arm can be painful if you've just had chest surgery. I'm never very quick to piece these kind of things together on the spot, but luckily enough she switched quickly to asking about my diet. Her surprise at hearing that I don't eat meat made me briefly forget the odd exchange earlier.

It doesn't bother me when I get read as male or female, as I don't try to appear as anything other than a man in clothing designed for women. But I can't help but wonder sometimes. On that day in question, I had a decent amount of prominent stubble on my face, and my voice, as ever, was quite deep. Also, my name - John - was on the list that they

were ticking people off from as they came through. So... why they presumed I was a woman who'd had a double mastectomy is a touch puzzling. Ultimately, it didn't bother me, though upon talking about it was a friend later on that day, it was pointed out to me that if I was a woman who was quite flat chested, presuming that the reason why I was such was because I'd had my breasts removed could be taken quite badly.

This is something I encounter quite a bit - that is, deciding on the spot whether to take offense at someone's confusion or misunderstanding, or see it as a learning experience for them. As I mentioned earlier, I'm crap at thinking stuff through on the spot - any humour that exists on subtle spectrum tends to pass me by. So my reaction to other people's reaction to me tends to just mirror what their doing to an extent. If they can't quite think of what to say, neither can I. If I'm asked, "Why are you dressed like that?", I'll probably just look away from them quickly and say, "It's my choice..." and quickly distract them with something that actually matters.

Much like most insecure folk fostering a strong inner anger, I have lots of practice arguments in front of mirrors between myself and an anticipated other, in the hope that the exact same sequence of words will be used by someone in an actually real situation - I'll look victorious, they'll whimper away embarrassed and crushed. For a long period of time, I carried around a print-out from the entry for "Faggot" on the on-line version of the Oxford English Dictionary, with definition 2.a. - referring to the burning of heretics – highlighted, just in case someone happened to fling that particular one in my direction, and I could then launch into a fiery history lesson. Course, the one time someone muttered that at me, I was at work and didn't have my print-out... I just stood there, and stared at them, eventually saying, "You can't talk to us like that", and **WENT** ~~storming~~ storming off to my shift leader, asking him to give security a call. I hate calling security, by the way.

Context is everything. Most contexts, I figure,

shouldn't require people to know why I look/dress the way that I do, but it's not just place that dictate that. The best example of this that I've pondered over is with pre-teen children - at what age should I presume that it's no longer acceptable for someone to ask whether I'm a man or a woman? If any adult were to ask me this, I'd like to think I'd fling back, "None of your business." As much as I know that one's perceived gender quite drastically changes the way that people interact with you, it really shouldn't. Those reactions are often in-built, and often not questioned. By not giving them an answer on that, I hope I'm doing something towards getting them to think about the different way they treat people. Also, I generally don't like talking to strangers about my cock. Maybe if they'd get to the point of it quicker by asking, "Do you have a penis or a vagina?", I might be a touch more forgiving.

Hang on... wait... no. Not at all.

If you're not about to ask me out, you really really don't need to know. Hell, just make up your own mind and run with that.

I have had encounters with people that are less confrontational, though, which I'll admit I'm even less prepared for. One time, for example, I was waiting for a connecting train one weekday evening in North Melbourne Train Station, and a guy sitting to the right of me, after politely moving aside to give me space to sit, asked me if "...that (was) a skirt?" My response was a bit curt - something like, "Yep... that's what they call 'em" - which I'm a bit embarrassed about in hindsight. The guy wasn't threatening, and he wasn't asking anything about what I looked like beneath the skirt - he seemed to have made his mind up about that, which I could have taken issue with, but he was polite enough to keep that to himself. I sometimes wonder whether my instinct to jump towards righteous-indignance and aggression has something to do with me wanting to sub-consciously go against the expectation that folk who present as feminine in public are more likely to be gentle and friendly. But even if that was the case, it's hard to feel proud about lashing out at someone.

Every Sunday night is "family night" in my place. My housemates and I (and occasionally other willing friends who don't mind playing the shameful nerd for an evening) share a big meal together, then head upstairs to housemate Al's room to watch Doctor Who and eat chocolate. It's a pretty sacred event - any deviation in plans is responded to with much scorn, head-shaking, and graphic references to the number of episodes that'll be plowed through in the respective housemate's absence.

We're even pretty reliable in where we sit - me on the bean-bag, and Al and Ahmarnya on the couch. Since discovering my love of short skirts, I've somehow overlooked how that would interact with my love of bean-bags, and all their grace-stripping ways. The ease with which one's skirt can easily hike up at least half a foot when you collapse on one of those comfortable brown seats of love is also something that should be more apparent to me. So, often, I'd be paused mid conversation by the phrase:

"John... I can see your gusset."

A blush, a waist shuffle, and we switch back to talking about that damn thirteenth regeneration.

In the process of writing this zine, I've come to realise that engaging with awkwardness has governed most of my experiences of being a public tranny, often more so than fear of violence (verbal or physical). It's, "Will they see my belly?", "Is this too much face powder?", "I really fuckin' hope I don't fall over", and so on. Fear, really, was more a controlling factor of the years leading up until now (course, I did decide to bail on a great gig this evening because it was in a creepy end of a town I still don't feel quit comfortable in – it still ain't left yet).

There's still fear, as I hate embarrassment comedy, but it's more of a balancing act – it's a slow series of rickety steps for me to pick myself up off every now and then. It's a solo dance to a tune in my head that I chose knowing full well how catchy it was.

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