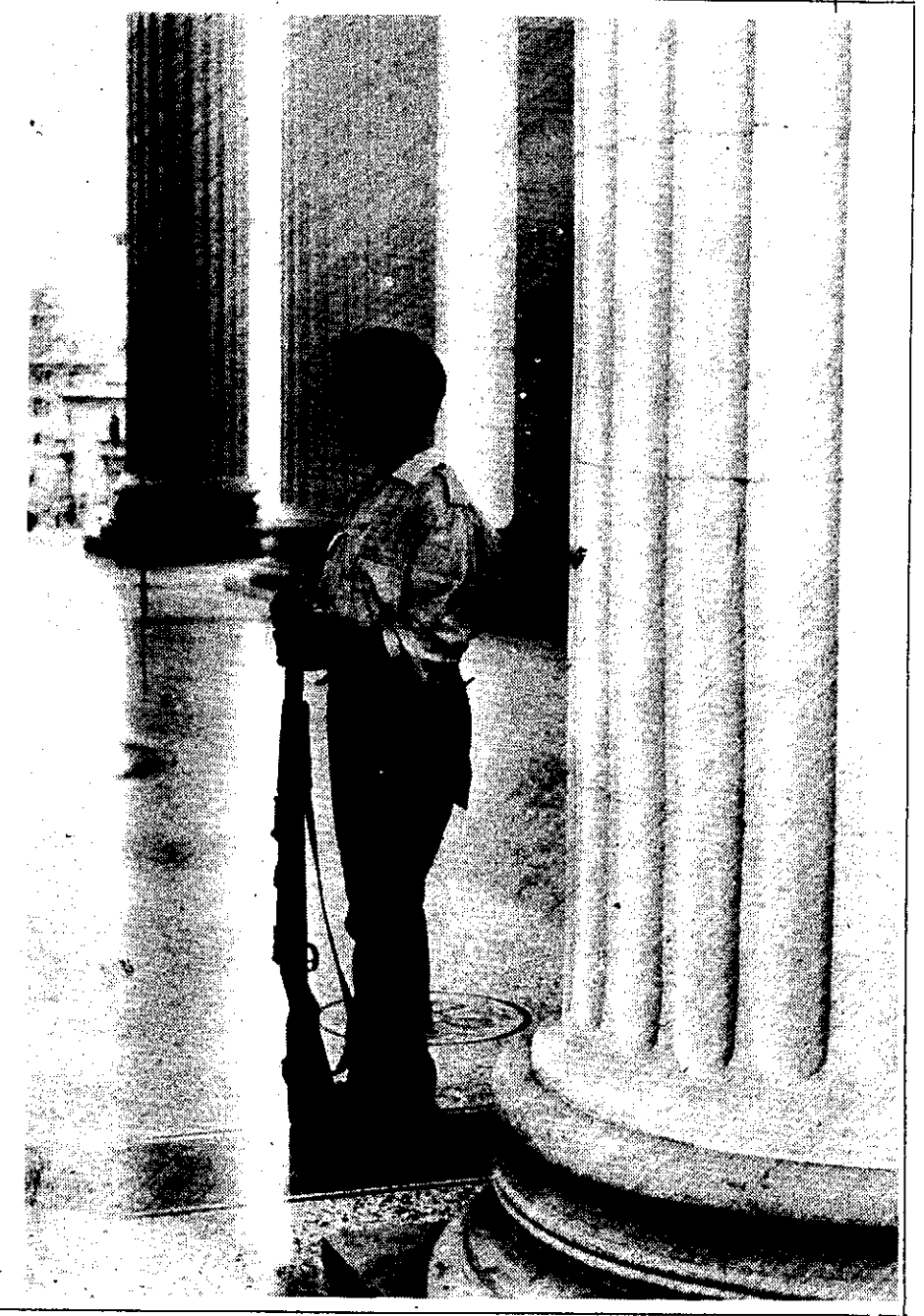


PHOTO ESSAY BY ELLEN BEDOZ





WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE

by Bob Kohler

I'll call them Mitzi and Sal. Mitzi, who owns up to seventeen, had never been seen out of Drag since she hit the Park sometime in mid-Summer. Sal, pushing twenty-one, was making her local Drag debut. It was a typical Sunday night in Sheridan Square. Translated, that means the area appeared to have been taken over by the third touring company of MARAT/SADE. Mitzi was bench-hopping, rapping with friends. Sal, on the other hand, was on edge. She had blown a hustle by over-estimating the powers of Elizabeth Arden. It had taken five coats of make-up to hide her heavy beard and tempus had cruelly fugited; by the time she got herself together her Date had split and she was forced to resign herself to a quiet (!) night on Christopher Street. Together they primped and posed, Mistresses of all they surveyed. If truth be known, a blind man could tell they weren't real. That, however, is a moot point; they were doing their thing and that was all that mattered.

It happened quickly and with little warning: enter a young Cop with a foul mouth and hard-on about Drag Queens and before you could say "Get back, Beast!" our Girls were on their way to the 6th Precinct. Fond farewells, garbled instructions, and a few unprintable epithets echoed through the Park. Courses of action were considered. These included demolishing the Park, fire-bombing the Precinct, and setting Christopher Street afire. As the first drops of rain began to fall it was suddenly and unanimously agreed that Mitzi and Sal were going to be a lot better off than most, they would have a roof over their heads. The race was on for doorways and alleys.

100 Centre Street. Criminal Courts Building. Room 1A. Monday morning. Mitzi and Sal were in "the docket" sandwiched between a motley assortment of Junkies, Winos, Pimps, Hookers, Finks, and two scared-looking Hippies. Mitzi was flirting outrageously with the handsomer of the two. Case after case came before the Judge. Suddenly a Wino fell to the floor and thrashed about wildly. The less fortunate looking of the two Hippies muttered, "Far out, Man!" Both were removed and the Theatre of the Ridiculous resumed. The night had not been kind to Mitzi and Sal. Mitzi's face had surrendered to some ugly red blotches and I thought to myself, "Seventeen, my ass! She's nineteen if she's a day!" Sal's face had cracked in a hundred places and a full stubble of beard had forced its way through the Kem-tone.

The charge was Female Impersonation and Loitering. Case Dismissed! We gathered in the busy corridor for a cigarette. Mitzi announced she had to pee and promptly disappeared into the Ladies Room. As soon as I regained possession of my vocal cords I yelled for Sal to get her the hell out. Sal made a dash for the toilet and as the door closed behind her I realized that now both of them were in the Ladies Room. Fuck you, Madalyn Murray, there is so a God! How else could we have made it out there alive?

I had brought down some Men's clothing for Mitzi and Sal to change into but they would have no part of my impassioned pleas. They did, however, hang shirts — bridal fashion — over their heads to protect their wigs from a deluge that made the Rains of Ranchipur look like a Sun Shower. Huddled under one umbrella we embarked upon the ten-block walk to the Subway through the Wall Street during lunch hour. So much of it is a blur — the walk, the stop at Chock Full O' Nuts for coffee, the Subway ride. Sometimes I get flashbacks and I hear the gasps, the sound of cups clattering to the floor, and I see the horror-stricken faces on the IRT as our girls, compacts in hand, try vainly to repair some of the damages.

We parted at Sheridan Square. The sun had come out. So had the people. Mitzi rewarded me with a kiss,



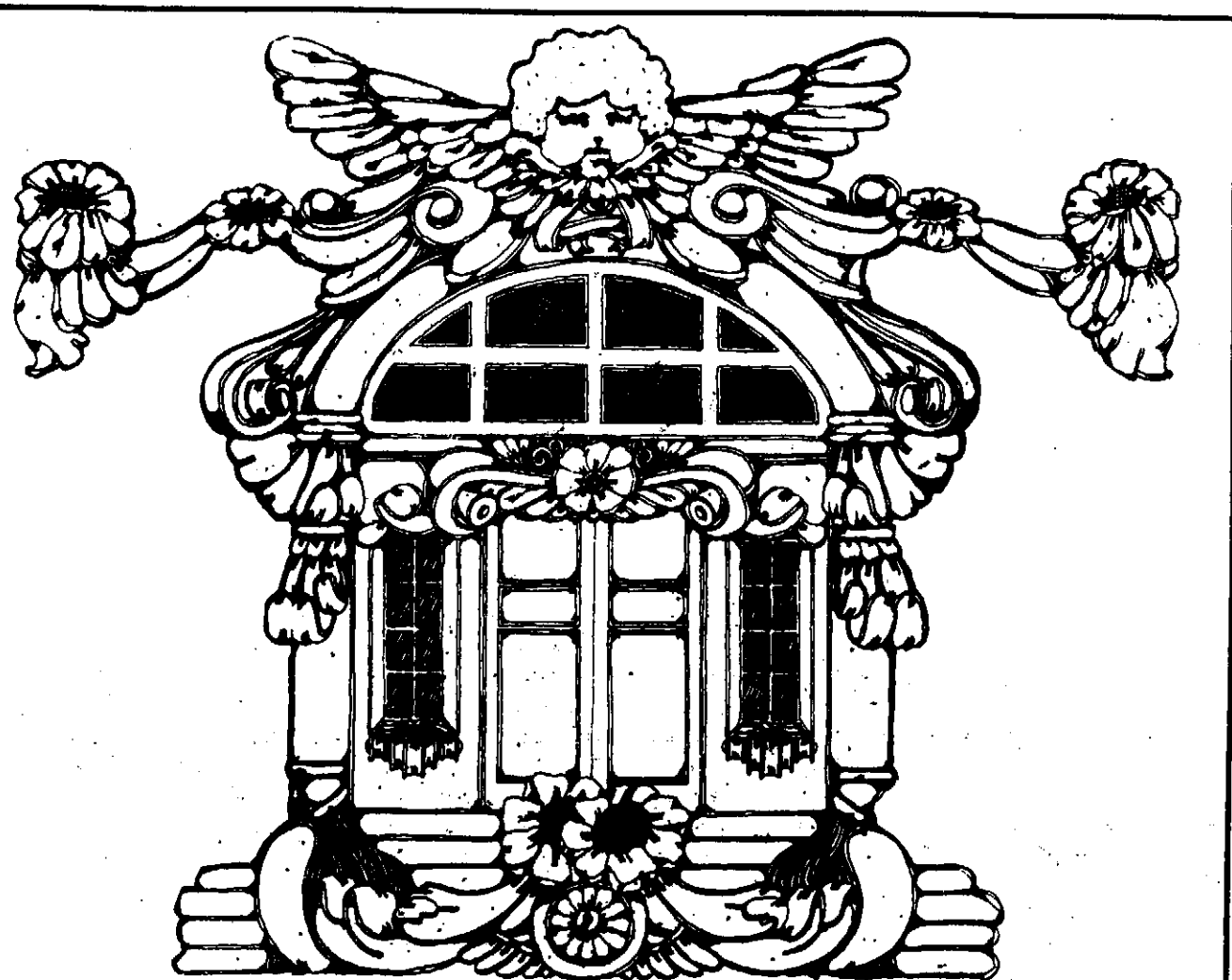
photo by Diana Davies

Sal with an impassioned hug. Heads turned and tongues wagged. I stood there, drenched to my jock-strap and watched them skip across the street. I remembered when, only weeks ago, Christopher Street was a battleground, when cries of "Gay Power" and "Kill the Pig" echoed through the Square, when windows were smashed, fires burned nightly, and Cops were beaten. I remembered Lola Montez, Orphan Annie, Miss New Orleans, and the Cab Driver who had a heart attack when his cab was over-turned (in time of peace and war — the man said — many sparrows fall!) and the plea scrawled on the sidewalk in front of the Stonewall: BUTCHES, WHERE ARE YOU NOW THAT WE NEED YOU?" I think that cry for help was the thing that remained most indelibly stamped on my mind. Like, it was all there in one simple, desperate question. And — where the fuck were we?

The riots continued for about two weeks; the tension, the police barricades, and the TPF occupied the Square for the entire Summer. For reasons not very clear to me at the time, I began hanging around the Square, getting to know the Street kids, helping them out with a quarter when I could (a quarter for macaroni salad, a

quarter for bobby pins, a quarter for a coke, a quarter for nail polish, a quarter for Ex-Lax to relieve the effects of too much macaroni salad). I made countless trips to St. Vincent's, the VD Clinic, the 6th Precinct, and 100 Centre Street. I also begged a lot. I begged individual homosexuals and homophile organizations for clothing, for money, for help. With few, but notable, exceptions, I got a lot of bullshit. I tried to cooperate with a Do-Good Committee of Homosexuals who descended upon the Street like a band of Vigilantes in search of a cause. A few of the kids died last Summer, a few made it into the Big-Time (translated: a job and a roof over their heads), others, beaten down, went home. But most of them stayed, they stayed to hang in and to prove that the riots were not solely the product of hysteria, boredom, or drugs. They had claimed their right to exist and had proven they were willing to fight for it. I learned a helluva lot from those kids. I have lived in the Village for a long time as a nice, quiet, "law-abiding" citizen. I know that I wouldn't be able to live that way any longer. I remembered a Black woman who, many years ago, got

on a bus in the deep South and sat down in the first available seat, and for Rosa Parks and every other human being, the world would never be the same again. I don't know if the Stonewall riots will ever be recorded in history books but I do know that my world — my safe, smug, little world has not been the same since. I learned something this past Summer, something I can't put into words yet, but whatever it is, it helped me to stand in front of the Village Voice on a Gay picket line and say Fuck You to the Closet Cases and Straights who looked at me aghast for standing up to be counted. BUTCHES, WHERE ARE YOU? It helped me to walk through Wall Street with Mitzi and Sal and say Up Yours to the gaping crowd. It helped me to realize that Drag Queens are more than a part of my culture — they are a part of me. Someone once said: No one is free until everyone is free. Well, Man, I want to be free! I know a lot of shit is going to go down before that happens but, for the first time in my life, I'm ready. And you know what? It's a Goddamn good feeling!



COMMUNITY CENTER

The Gay Liberation Front is in dire need of a Community Center. In five short months we have accomplished more than we dreamed possible. We have confronted the Mayoral Candidates, participated under our banner in the Moratorium, funded a Newspaper, published periodic Newsletters, successfully picketed The Village Voice, fed and clothed needy people, formed Encounter groups and given the militant Homosexual a voice in the Commun-

ity. We have no dues and no membership fees. Our only source of income is a monthly Dance. We do not even have a regular meeting place. Our dream is a Community Center to serve the needs of the Homosexual. Our reality could be a basement, a loft, a studio, any place we could set up an office, telephones, hold dances, and conduct meetings. Can anyone help us? The life you FIND may be your own!

Gay Liberation Front

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