

POWERPUFF GIRLS • DOLLY PARTON • KATHERINE V. FORREST

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

October 2002

# Girlfriends

After *Ally McBeal*,  
what's next for de Rossi?

Special Report

## PORTIA DE ROSSI

Glamour, Gossip, and the  
Perils of Hollywood Femmes

### HER LEFT BREAST

Susan Miller on  
her Cancer Play

### THE NICOTINE WARS

Clearing the Air  
in Lesbian Space

### RECIPES AGAINST CANCER

New Cookbook  
Reviewed

**plus:**

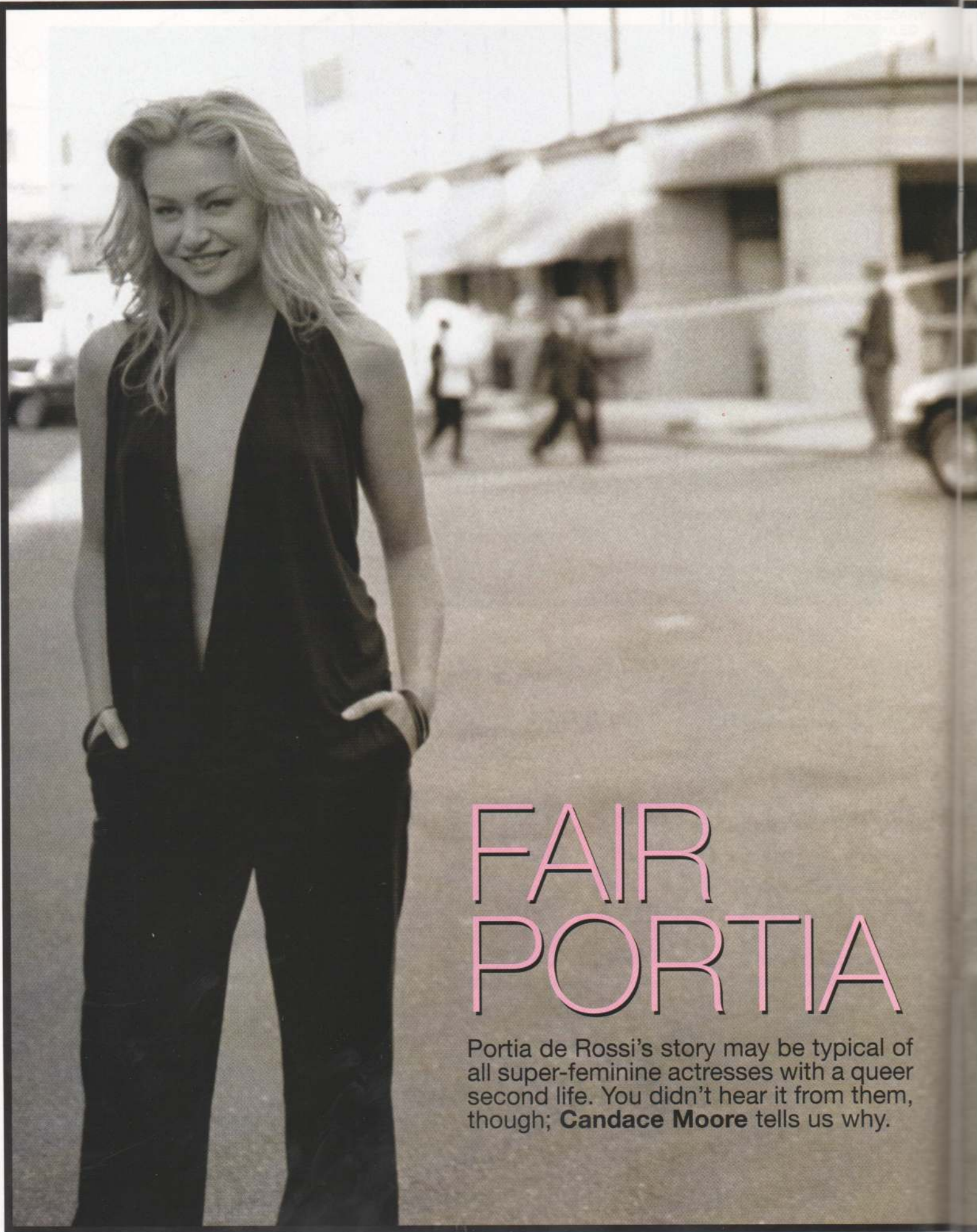
What comic  
Sabrina Matthews  
did on her  
summer vacation

\$4.95 US \$7.95 Canada



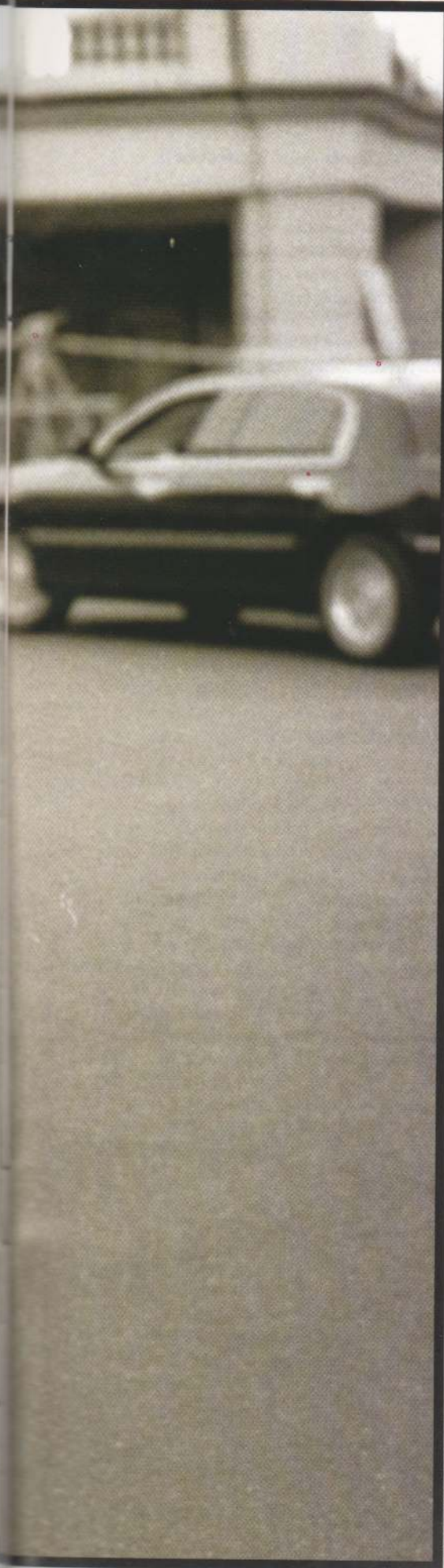
Display until October 31

[www.girlfriendsmag.com](http://www.girlfriendsmag.com)



# FAIR PORTIA

Portia de Rossi's story may be typical of all super-feminine actresses with a queer second life. You didn't hear it from them, though; **Candace Moore** tells us why.



"A tight butt works wonders, wouldn'tcha say?" Proving that Hollywood cliché was former *Ally McBeal* 'torney with 'tude... Portia de Rossi, walking her two black-and-white doggies—with her gorgeous gal-pal, Francesca Gregorini (stepdaughter of Ringo Starr), by her side—along the cool streets of Silverlake on an earlyish Sunday morn. Pretty Portia looked down to earth in army-green pants and a similarly colored tank top. The g-p went for the twin look in orange trousers and a skin-baring tank. Holding hands, with their hair loose and flowing, the two babes headed down the street toward a coffee kind of destination..."

—Ted Casablanca, May, 30, 2002.

**T**his spoonful of E! gossip reads like runway voice-over meets lesbian soft-core, although it describes a moment so ordinary and mundane, the sort we live out every day, semi-privately with our girlfriends. But it's hard to not be dazzled by the concept of Portia de Rossi (the vampy blonde who portrayed man-eater lawyer Nelle Porter on David E. Kelly's kooky, recently-canceled courtroom sitcom *Ally McBeal*) taking an openly loving Sunday stroll with her equally beautiful rocker girlfriend, Francesca.

And dazzled we are. *The Star*, *World Entertainment News*, the *New York Post*, *The Daily Star* and every other tabloid press and gossip columnist have been hot on the high heels of the long-haired lovers since snapshots of them enthusiastically groping each other in a West Hollywood back alley surfaced last November. When Portia and Francesca attended this May's opening night of the Andy Warhol retrospective at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, the television actress was so badgered by a hack reporter as to who her "friend" was, the couple decided to cut their visit short.

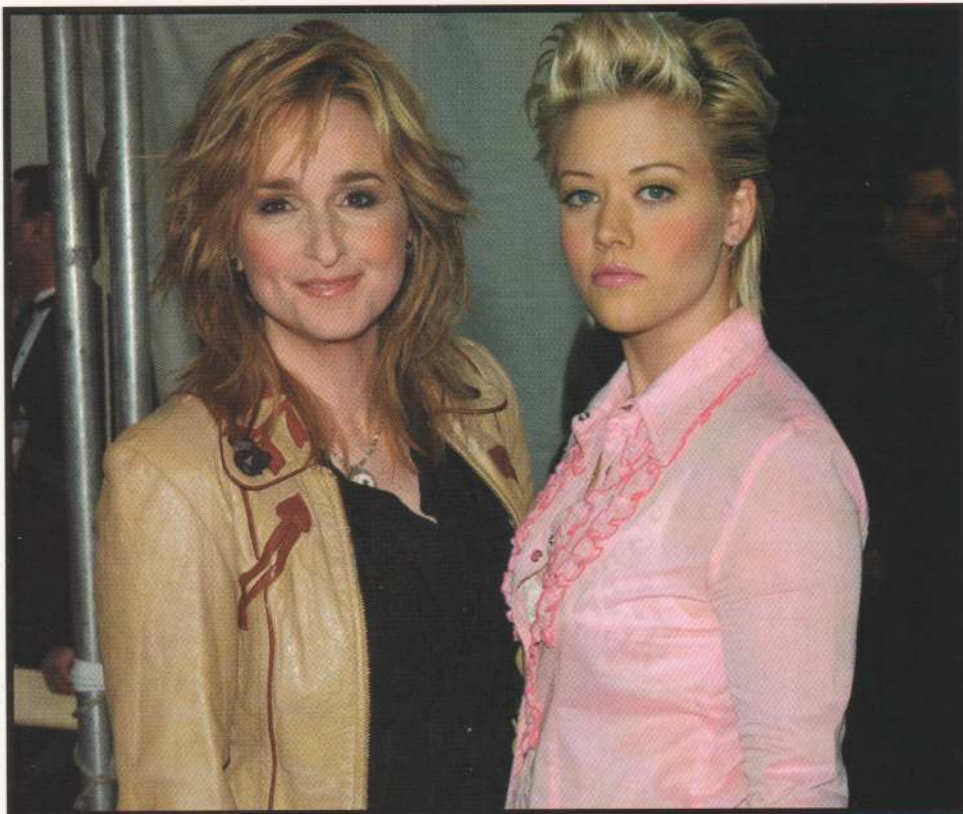
Numerous attempts to squeeze out a verbal confirmation of the lesbian nature of their companionship have met with "no comment." But de Rossi and Gregorini aren't exactly hiding out in their love nest with a year's rations either. The couple entered the Warhol show holding hands in plain view of cameras and

lookilooos—a public declaration, albeit a subtle one. The two women have also been spotted together at various Hollywood events and parties, including the 2001 Silver Lining Silver Lake benefit for the Hollywood Sunset Free Clinic, where an attendee described them as "affectionate with each other," "obviously very much in love," and "sweet, natural, and unpretentious."

#### FEMMING IT UP

Without her formal consent, Portia de Rossi is fast becoming Hollywood's new femme poster girl. Often photographed in designer dresses and wraps (her faves being of the classic Chanel variety), with her long Goldilocks-style tresses coiffed in a variety of fashions, de Rossi is aiming for the ranks of the silver screen's famed lipstick divas, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. Like them, she oozes a glamorous sensuality compelling to all genders, and she's flirty but coy about her own same-sex affairs.

In *Fairy Butch's Dyke Identity Dictionary*, sexologist Karlyn Lotney defines *femme* as a "dyke who embodies a typically feminine behaviors or characteristics or reclaims same through a queer perspective." Indeed, the image de Rossi portrays to the world at large is distinctly more sleek and glam than Rosie O'Donnell's or Ellen DeGeneres's comfy, tomboy-next-door look. Her arched eyebrows and insouciant pouts seem more like relics from Marilyn Monroe's time. At



the recent *Blood Work* premiere, she wore a revealing black suit coat (sans blouse) designed to trace her cleavage down to her perfect belly. She also sported a huge diamond rock on her ring finger.

In her private life, though, the Melbourne-born twenty-nine-year-old can't be pegged down as pure girly-girl. De Rossi unwinds by piloting helicopters, prefers hip huggers, and drives a sporty black Carrera. *Instyle* described the actress as "having thrown on a pair of black Puma track pants and an Iggy Pop T-shirt...she's nursing a coffee and sitting cross-legged on a funky seventies fur chair. Without make-up and with her blonde plumage pulled back into a ponytail, she seems naturally easygoing, the opposite of her nasty *Ally McBeal* character."

Like Garbo, who preferred to wear pants around the house (as well as to be left alone), de Rossi's high femininity is what it is for most actresses: a performance. Like Lotney's femme, she may even be "reclaim[ing it] through a queer perspective."

#### NO MORE MEAT PIES

Much before acquiring the role of Subzero Nelle (nicknamed for the lawyer's cool veneer) on the Emmy-winning show *Ally McBeal*, Australian native Amanda Rogers (de Rossi's real name) was, oddly enough, a young, diligent law student at Melbourne University. She randomly auditioned for a local, low-budget film that gave her the role of an erotic muse, Giddy, and the acting bug for good. That film happened to be *Sirens* (1994), costarring Hugh Grant and Elle Macpherson, which did decently enough at the box office to coerce Mandy, as her friends knew her, to cross the Pacific in pursuit of more drama. Although her "G'Day, Mate" accent largely dissipated, de Rossi admitted to *Esquire* that she misses her homeland's dishes: "I miss the big meat pies and the potato cakes. Oh, and I love the sausage rolls..."

Starved of her sausage rolls, de Rossi landed a role in the tongue-in-

---

TV actress Tammy Lynn Michaels (above left) has been public about her sexuality and her relationship with rocker Melissa Etheridge; Gregorini and de Rossi take family pets for a spin.



cheek teen horror spin-off *Scream 2* (1997) as a sorority sister caught up in the hack-fest. After dabbling in some marginally successful TV shows, de Rossi finally found one that suited her—literally, in Armani—when she joined the ensemble cast of *Ally* as a litigating sex kitten with claws, smarts, and an odd soft side. Toeing the line between anti-feminist glee and a ribald skewering of straight stereotypes, the show was packed full of silly, magic-realist moments. At

The **FEMME** actress is more than **FROWNED** upon; she is **QUARANTINED** from heterosexual **ROMANTIC** leads.

times the quirky stuff invigorated *Ally's* five-year run, and at times grew worn. The show's creators played shamelessly to sweeps weeks—in one instance hyping a random lesbian screen kiss between lead Calista Flockhart and Lucy Liu's character Ling (with no real place in the plot arc) for ratings.

Meanwhile, *McBeal's* blonde bombshell wasn't advertising her offstage kisses. A budding romance between de Rossi and Guinevere Turner, the writer, producer, and costar of *Go*

*Fish*, hit rumor mills in early 2001. Performance artist Vaginal Davis gossiped that "career dyke heartthrob Gwyn Turner (*American Psycho*) and her love interest Portia de Rossi from *Ally McBeal*" were lively guests at the drag queen's birthday bash.

#### ENTER MS. GREGORINI

Thirty-three-year-old, dark-haired Francesca Gregorini must have promptly swept Portia off her feet and away from Turner sometime in the middle of 2001. Born in Rome to Bond girl Barbara Bach, and raised between Italy, England, and Los Angeles, the Brown University graduate (and step-daughter to Beatles' drummer Ringo Starr) has played piano, guitar, and bass most of her life. Her solo efforts have been garnering radio airplay on member-supported L.A. indie station KCRW and two of her songs can be found on the soundtrack to *See Jane Run* (the latest Clea DuVall vehicle). Gregorini also co-owns a Los Feliz clothing boutique called *Steinberg and Sons* with Tatiana von Furstenberg that specializes in the color pink. Waif-thin, feminine and bohemian, Gregorini has a contemporary, art school look that compliments de Rossi's precisely.

The starry-eyed duo was soon spotted entangled all over town, eating sushi, sipping cocktails, taking walks, and friskily petting throughout

Beverly Hills and West Hollywood. By most accounts they weren't at all camera shy. Besides the steamy alley photos, which were obviously taken on the sly, the lovers "seemed happy to let photographers snap them feeding each other and embracing in a trendy Los Angeles eatery, Sushi



Hollywood execs said Anne Heche wouldn't fly as Harrison Ford's on-screen squeeze.

Row" reported *Womanspace Newsletter*. A Swedish newspaper, *Aftonbladet*, describes them as "not at all distracted by (celebrity photographers), quite the opposite really."

Possibly all this fuss has led to more discretion from the pair, said to be comfortably out among family and

continued on page 42

## Hollywood's Femme Closet: A Short History

**GRETA GARBO** was infamous for being discrete to a fault, excommunicating friends and lovers who'd shed a scrap of gossip, juicy or drab, to the press. It may have been the blonde Swede who kept cohorts (mostly) quiet about her well-documented lesbian flings with Castillian-blooded writer Mercedes de Acosta during the depression and (allegedly) with bisexual predator Marlene Dietrich during Berlin's swinging twenties. It may have been the disappearing-act PR wizardry of the studios; we will never know. One thing, however, is perfectly clear: MGM made a fortune on Garbo's sumptuous face, which French semiotician Roland Barthes described as representing "a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced." Part of her allure, the studio had to know—they cast her in *Queen Christina* for goodness sakes!—was glued to a penetrative feminine sexuality that included desire for other women.

Hollywood's heyday during the twenties and thirties marked a distinctly different tinseltown then ours today. Female actresses stood at the busy intersection between the sexually free ideals of the flappers and a growing big brotherism among studio moguls. In *The Girls: Sappho Goes to Hollywood*, Diana McLellan cites a "1920s study of 2,200 American women, mostly middle-class" out of which "50.4 percent admitted intense emotional relations with other women, and half that number said that those experiences were either 'accompanied by sex or recognized as sexual in character.'" This was the eros beneath the era, even as Hollywood's first morality codes were being stapled into place. Queer actresses could wake up to find their names on "unsafe" lists, as in the case of Alla Nazimova, a theatre actress from the first decade of the twentieth century, a lesbian who is said to have had a short-lived, but passionate affair with anarchist Emma Goldman.

Golden Age Hollywood femmes lived a series of odd, uncomfortable compromises among their private affairs, their eroticized public images, and the demands of Hollywood's censorious codes. As femme fatale Barbara Stanwyck answered *Hollywood Lesbians'* Boze Hadleigh when he asked how actresses dealt with indiscretions in old Hollywood: "they'd [the studios would] keep it quiet. Or she'd keep her mouth shut. Now they make a big deal out of everything, so we can't tell them anything."—C.M.



Studios recognized Garbo's bisexual appeal but kept her affairs quiet.

## Roommate Drama

Sparks are guaranteed to fly when women set up house.

by **Candace Moore**

### Mismatched roomies at a women's

writer's retreat butt heads on everything from grinding coffee to theories of intimacy in Nicole Conn's well-intentioned, if amateurish, lesbian classic. This love story, an elongated tease, follows presumably straight Claire Jabrowski (Trisha Todd), author of cynical bestseller *Life Can Ruin Your Hair*, and out dyke Dr. Noel Benedict (Karen Trumbo), a prolific sex shrink, through numerous pop-psych debates and flirty cat fights before they finally fling off their clothes.

A goody-filled double-DVD consummates *Claire's* tenth birthday. Grade: **C+**



Lesbian roomies get close—very close—in *Claire of the Moon*.

#### Claire of the Moon

dir. Nicole Conn  
Wolfe Video, 107 min.

#### Silkwood (20th Century Fox, 1983)

Forget *Sophie's Choice*: *Silkwood* allows Meryl Streep a role where she sports the niftiest, fringiest seventies haircut. Streep plays Karen, a tough plutonium-wrangling factory worker who starts union organizing once she realizes that punching her timecard correlates with her percentage of internal irradiation. Boyfriend Drew (Kurt Russell) and stoner roommate Dolly (Cher) make up Karen's found-family-in-the-boondocks, who support each other through near-apocalyptic trauma. When Dolly's formaldehyde-scented girlfriend leaves her, Karen cradles her best friend on their porch swing in one of many touching moments of an altogether cry-provoking film. Grade: **A**

#### Love and Other Catastrophes (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1996)

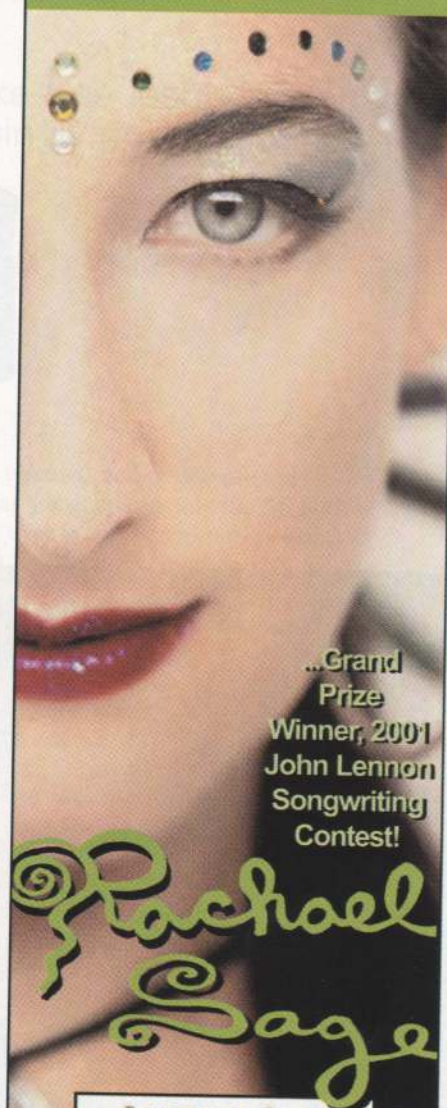
Aussie director Emma-Kate Croghan's indie debut features the hormonal hijinks of five Melbourne university students as they suffer the perils of conjugating Latin, pursuing love, eradicating library fines, and finding suitable flatmates. Mia (Parker Posey-esque Frances O'Connor) is the self-obsessed, albeit charming nexus around which her campus clique revolves. Commitment-phobic, she ignores and mistakenly dumps her button-cute girlfriend Danni (*High Art's* Radha Mitchell), only to make puppy-dog eyes later and ask her to move in. A happy-go-lucky, if sophomoric, piece, this pro-queer film refrains from squashing its lady-lovers into stereotypes. Grade: **B**

#### Single White Female (Columbia Pictures, 1992)

Part of an early-nineties niche of lesbian killer thrillers, *Single White Female* follows suit with the sick mold. Jennifer Jason Leigh plays Hedra, a deranged twin who blames herself for her sister's drowning, and has since confused narcissism, sisterly love, and murder-bent lust. Feigning as a timid, mousy bookstore worker, the psycho killer answers a room-for-rent ad put out by computer programmer Allison Jones (Bridget Fonda), becomes completely obsessed with her fashionable redheaded roommate, and slowly doppelgangers her wardrobe and haircut. The two order Chinese food and giggle like gals at a sleepover until Hedra, wearing undies more and more often around the house, throws their puppy out the window—anything to have Allison all to herself. Grade: **B-**

Candace Moore, co-editor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in L.A.

"ILLUSION'S CARNIVAL"  
IN STORES NOW!



...Grand  
Prize  
Winner, 2001  
John Lennon  
Songwriting  
Contest!

Rachael  
Sage



On Tour NOW - Check Website for Updates

"If you enjoy Tori, Suzanne Vega, Elton  
and Ani you'll find yourself entranced  
with Rachael's sorceress vibes"  
- Women of MP3.com

"A phenomenal talent in her own right...  
a way with a melody that grabs  
your ear and doesn't let go"  
- Outvoice.com



WWW.RACHAELSAGE.COM  
1.877.TRU.SAGE

# Breast Cancer Daze

Last week a good friend of mine, Terri, found three lumps in her breast. The news felt almost too dangerous to dwell on, like if I thought about it too much it would drag me under. The feeling was like the anxiety one feels about a possible stock market crash, a bill too big to pay, war with Iraq—big things that make you feel panicky yet helpless. It seems, too, that the difficult news comes in packages: this year, one of the central events in my local lesbian community was the breast-cancer death and memorial service of Kris Kovick, a writer, illustrator, and mentor to many local artists. Plus, Terri's lover just survived her dear brother's diagnosis and (so far) successful battle against lymphoma.

"Oh, no," I thought. "What's next?"

That's the saddest rhetorical question of them all. Because in the case of lesbians and breast cancer, I always feel like I'm looking around thinking,

"Who's next?" My friend is successful and openly gay, so she goes to her doctor regularly and consults with her frankly. But for one Terri, there are ten lesbians who are too strapped for cash or too closeted to get quality, routine health-care. And if it is true that we're more vulnerable to breast cancer (because, we're told, we drink and smoke a lot and don't tend to get pregnant, nurse babies, or get check-ups), that means that the news is all the more likely to stay bad.

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month every October, *Girlfriends* bucks the magazine industry's "good news only" trend and dedicates editorial to breast cancer and lesbian health, even if the coverage is sobering. This issue, we asked Susan Miller, the Obie-winning playwright who penned *My Left Breast*, to write our Soapbox. Also, *Girlfriends* returns to the problem of smoking in the lesbian

community, as Jean Roberta fills us in on the ideological rift between lesbians who smoke and those who don't. (Leave it to lesbians to have fully politicized both sides of the debate.) Most of all, I'm excited about a first in *Girlfriends*: our debut, full-length review of a cookbook, *The Breast Cancer Prevention Cookbook*.

These recipes may help staunch the flow of bad news, so get out your apron. Oh, and happy, happy news: Terri's tests came back okay.



Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

Sign up for our online newsletter at [www.girlfriendsmag.com](http://www.girlfriendsmag.com)

# Girlfriends

Heather Findlay  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Jen Phillips  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Christine Shearer  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Yetta Howard, Kylie Johnston,  
Erin O'Brian, Julie Strubinger  
COPY EDITORS

Beth Brown, Patrick Califia,  
Jill Dearman, Judith Halberstam,  
Candace Moore, Ann Rostow,  
Lori Selke  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Diana Cage, Lauren Dockett,  
Sara Felder, Naomi Graychase,  
Beth Greenfield, Carson Hunter,  
K Kaufmann, Gillian Kendall,  
Sabrina Matthews, Carolyn Ogburn,  
Joy Parks, Linda Schlossberg,  
Carrie Spector  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

J. Ethan Duran  
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Rani Goel  
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Julie Strubinger  
ART INTERN

Phyllis Christopher, Horace Long,  
Rebecca McBride, Beverly Paet,  
Siddiqi Ray, Rachelle Lee Smith  
CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Kirsten D. Hammer, Robyn Head,  
Jennifer Kallis, Barbara Pollak  
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Erin Findlay  
PUBLISHER

Catherine Draper  
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Anthony Gordon  
ACCOUNT MANAGER

Adriana Gordon  
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

Nicole Lanzotti  
CIRCULATION ASSISTANT

Julia Hyde  
CIRCULATION INTERN

Girlfriends Magazine  
Volume 9, Issue 4

H.A.F. ENTERPRISES  
publisher of *Girlfriends*,  
*On Our Backs*, and  
*Inside Price* guides  
3415 César Chávez, Ste. 101  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
415-648-9484 (phone)  
415-648-4705 (fax)  
staff@girlfriendsmag.com

Reproduction in whole or in part  
without permission is prohibited.  
Publication of the name or  
photograph of any persons or  
organizations appearing,  
advertising, or listing in  
*Girlfriends* may not be taken  
as an indication of the sexual  
orientation of that individual or  
group unless specifically stated.

Send letters to the editor to the  
above address, or e-mail to  
editorial@girlfriendsmag.com.  
Obtain writer's guidelines from  
[www.girlfriendsmag.com](http://www.girlfriendsmag.com).

*Girlfriends* (ISSN 1076-8875)  
is published monthly by  
H.A.F. Enterprises,  
3415 César Chávez, Ste. 101,  
San Francisco, CA 94110.  
One-year subscriptions are \$29.95.  
(Canadian subscribers add \$10;  
other foreign subscribers add \$15.)  
Periodicals Postage Paid at  
San Francisco and at additional  
mailing offices. POSTMASTER:  
Send address changes to:  
*Girlfriends*, P.O. Box 500  
Missouri City, TX 77459-9904.

**SUBSCRIPTION  
QUESTIONS?  
Call 800-GRL-FRND**

[www.girlfriendsmag.com](http://www.girlfriendsmag.com)

for advertising rates  
call 415-648-9484  
sales@girlfriendsmag.com



I interviewed Kovick (left) for our March 1995 issue; we lost her this year.