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friend, à la Bettie Page

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does Hollywood in  
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**The *On Our Backs* Interview**

# Queen Guinevere

Sometimes in front, sometimes behind the camera, Guinevere Turner has her fingers in every pot in Hollywood.



Turner (left) with Mary Jane, who provides a sneak peek at the theme of Turner's upcoming Bettie Page biopic.

GUINEVERE TURNER MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT OUT LESBIAN IN HOLLYWOOD. NOT ONLY DID SHE, WITH ROSE TROCHE, PRODUCE *GO FISH*—THE FILM MANY CONSIDER THE BEGINNING OF LESBIAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA—AS AN OPENLY OUT WRITER, ACTRESS, PRODUCER, AND NOW DIRECTOR, TURNER HAS BEEN VITAL TO NUMEROUS GROUNDBREAKING LGBT PROJECTS, INCLUDING TV'S FIRST LESBIAN ENSEMBLE DRAMA, *The L Word*.

AN INDIE STAPLE, TURNER DOESN'T TURN HER NOSE UP AT THE MAINSTREAM. SHE CO-WROTE (WITH MARY HARRON) AND ACTED IN *AMERICAN PSYCHO*, WHICH DID QUITE WELL AT THE BOX OFFICE. A SECOND FILM PENNED BY TURNER AND HARRON, *THE NOTORIOUS BETTIE PAGE*, ABOUT THE '50S PINUP QUEEN, IS DUE THIS FALL. MOST RECENTLY, TURNER ADAPTED A VIDEO GAME, CULMINATING IN THE BIG-BUDGET VAMPIRE FLICK *BLOOD RAYNE*, STARRING BEN KINGSLEY AND MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ, OUT LATER THIS YEAR.

GUINEVERE AND I GABBED OVER BREAKFAST ABOUT SCARY STARFUCKERS, LESBO SEX ON TV, HER NEWEST PROJECTS, AND HOW SHE'D MAKE AN ENTICING SCHOOLTEACHER.

**On Our Backs: How do you deal with the sexual attention that comes with your celebrity? Do girls drape themselves on you?**

Guinevere Turner: In certain contexts, yes. Not drape, because I'm not into people doing that . . . I find it alienating to have a real conversation with someone who knows you only because they've seen you in a movie or on TV or in a magazine, but for some people, that's hot.

**OOB: For some people, that power is hot.**

GT: Friends of mine are like, "Hell, yeah, when we go to that city and that film festival, I'm going to fuck the cutest one that comes on to me!" Whereas, I'm like, "Ew, they're totally fucking a cardboard cutout of me." I was in London, a judge for this lesbian beauty contest. There was this other woman on the panel with me, in a band relatively famous at that time in England. We were cavorting around, getting drunk, and ended up going back to the place where I was

staying and fooling around. Just about when she was going to really get into it, she says in a British accent, "I can't believe I'm about to go down on Guinevere Turner."

**OOB: Oh, no! Tonya's line to Dana.**

GT: That's exactly where it comes from. I was like, "Oh, my god!" It had already gone too far. I couldn't get rid of her at that point.

**OOB: Might as well get laid.**

GT: But it was not hot, so not hot for me. I think everyone's a winner if you want a starfucker to fuck you: you're the star; they're the starfucker. There needs to be one of each in every scenario like that. But personally, it seems like a totally false interaction.

**OOB: Do you think you're recognized more lately from playing Gabby (Alice's not-so-nice ex) on *The L Word*?**

GT: The difference from being in a few lesbian independent movies and being in a show that's on TV is huge. I'm not even in *The L Word* that much, and they don't know that I wrote for it.

**OOB: Are you okay with discussing what happened recently with *The L Word*?**

GT: Well, my contract was renewable on a year-to-year basis, and they didn't renew it [for season three].

**OOB: You were part of getting this whole thing off the ground! I remember when it was called *Earthlings*; you were on the panel talking about it . . .**

GT: I wasn't part of the pilot, but I was part of the first staff. I came up with the name of the show—with Ilene [Chaiken]. I don't know why I wasn't asked back. I'm thinking it's because [she says with a tender amount of sarcasm] *I'm not a very good writer*. I wasn't given an explanation; I can only speculate.

**OOB: Fuck it, though! You have a bunch of other projects in the**

**works. Are you wrapped on the *Bettie Page* movie?**

GT: Yeah, director Mary Harron and I are done with post [production]. It should be coming out in the fall.

**OOB: Weren't you originally going to star in it? What happened?**

GT: We started writing *Bettie Page* in '95, stopped because we got asked to do *American Psycho*, then resumed. I was going to play Bettie Page, but I'm too "old and fat." Half the time you say that people go, "No, you're not" and I have to say, "I'm kidding!" They needed a name to raise the money. I could've insisted that I play her, and I would've been on a set that should be an extravagant period piece, where everyone knows my ego got in the way of us having more money.

**OOB: Who's playing Page?**

GT: Gretchen Mol, who's got Bettie Page down so well there's a point in the movie when you forget you're not looking at her.

**OOB: Page is this fetish symbol, but there are no sex scenes, per se, in the film.**

GT: Sexuality's projected onto her, but Page wasn't like, "I'm a sexpot. Rrrrowr, here I am, boys!" Her professional life as a model and her personal life were so different. She's naked a lot, and we have people perving out on her, because that's what her reality was like. Everything's about sexuality—a sex scene would be gratuitous.

**OOB: What was it like to work on a biopic? A lot of research?**

GT: Intense. The average person's life does not in any way fit a three-act structure, so there's always this question of how to make a good movie while being faithful to the person, without being so faithful that you're boring people.

**OOB: What did you think about *Kinsey*, for example?**

GT: I haven't seen *Kinsey*. I want to. I



do know someone who dated Liam Neeson, who confirmed the rumors about his penis. Someone asked my friend, "Is it true it's like a baby's arm holding an orange?" My friend who dated him goes, "It's more like a toddler holding a honeydew." Ew, ew, ew.

**OOB: What do you do with that!? Speaking of penises, though, and lesbian TV—Have you seen *Queer as Folk*?**

GT: I've only seen the first two seasons . . . I watched [it] when I started working on *The L Word*. I was *shocked* at how boring the lesbians were.

**OOB: The domesticity's rampant.**

GT: I was like, "Can we have some heinous fags just like they made some heinous lesbians?"

**OOB: No!**

GT: In season one there's this really creepy fag who's always trying to get Shane, and there's also a hairdresser, Shane's boss. When someone on set read my script, they were like, "You hate fags," because it said "bitchy queen" and "slimy fag," but I don't. Some of my best friends are fags! But, I was like, let's get back at them.

I heard a rumor that initially on *Queer as Folk* they didn't have lesbians—they were forced by the network to add them. [The writers] decided, "We're going to make them really boring, so you'll realize we don't want to write about lesbians." That's not saying that fags can't write for dykes, and dykes can't write for fags—we can—but at this particular moment in television, why should we?

**OOB: Now we have QTV and Here!TV.**

GT: Plus you have the *Queer Eye* queens running around, causing trouble. The first time I saw *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* on network TV, I was jaw-droppingly shocked. I thought: this is a huge step for queens. My best friend is like, "They're turning gay mainstream; I like gay to be dirty and underground." That's all nice and well until you get chained to a fence in the middle of the Midwest. We need to take these steps.

**OOB: What do you think about *Queer Eye for the Straight Girl*?**

GT: I don't get it. If we're going to have these hyperboles of fags, then we should have the dyke be the stereotypical dyke, i.e., she should be teaching the girl how to change a tire, how to put in a new cabinet.

**OOB: Instead she's teaching them how to put on makeup. So tell me about the newest short you've directed.**

GT: *Hung* is a ten-minute short about five lesbian friends who wake up and have a penis from sunrise to sunset. One just pees on everything for awhile. My character goes to a hardware store, tries to pick up chicks, and fails miserably. Two of them are a couple, and they have sex all day. The last one is freaking out; she hates having a penis . . . I just wanted it to be funny.

**OOB: Cool, when's that coming out?**

GT: I'm hoping to get it together by gay festival season this year. My last short, *Hummer*, hit every gay festival

*"queer eye for the straight girl should teach the girl how to change a tire, how to put in a new cabinet."*



in this country and probably, like, thirty in other countries. The first thing I directed was this little film called *Spare Me*, which went to Sundance. This last one, *Hung*, will be my third directing effort.

**OOB: Do you see yourself directing a full-length?**

GT: Yeah, that's the goal for the year. Does anyone have any money? It's written already. It's about two best friends, a lesbian and a gay man. The lesbian's ex-girlfriend has broken up with her because of her drinking and drug use and has gotten really famous as an artist doing work about drug and alcohol problems in the gay and lesbian community. She's having a big art opening. So the whole story takes place in one week where the two best friends decide that they have to be completely clean and sober so that they can look really, really good at her opening. Suffice it to say . . .

**OOB: It doesn't work.**

GT: Very *Ab Fab*. Very *Withnail and I*. It all goes horribly wrong.

**OOB: Do you see yourself working more in TV?**

GT: Working in TV was a big adjustment at first. Working on *The L Word*, everyone throws out ideas, ideas, ideas. Some are taken, some are not, some are taken and changed. You write someone else's ideas, and your own get rewritten.

**OOB: It's collaborative.**

GT: But not collaborative in the sense that no one comes back to you and says, "Do you mind if we change this and this?" So for a minute, I was

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like, "What the fuck, man?" Then I got into the groove of how TV works, and I learned a lot—most notably, how to write really fast because there are always huge last-minute changes, and how not to be too precious about what I am writing, because so much of it will change for reasons that have nothing to do with the writer. And there is this instant-gratification thing you have that you don't get in film—you're writing, and five months later, you're watching it. In film that's usually five years later. I'm not dying to be on another TV show writing staff—and anyway, what other kind of show could I possibly write for?—but I'd invent a TV show and *run* one for sure . . .

**OOB: Let's talk about lesbian sex on TV in general. The networks really haven't been able to show anything but a kiss. With Willow and Tara, there was sort of the idea that they were having sex, but . . .**

GT: Yeah, I kind of believed them as a couple. They were cute. Other than *Buffy*, what's been lesbo on network television?

**OOB: Very little. Roseanne in the early nineties. Ellen obviously. What's interesting about network television is how it's not lesbian at all. You have dribbles on ER and The OC. But, say with Ellen's talk show, she doesn't really talk about the fact that she's gay. It's a fabulous show, though.**

GT: How could you dance like that and not be gay?

**OOB: That's true! Of course, you've been out from the beginning. A lot of people would say that Go Fish is the beginning of lesbian independent film.**

GT: Unless you count *Claire of the Moon*. It did come out before us. I remember watching it while we were making *Go Fish*.

**OOB: True. But comparatively, Go Fish is also about lesbian community, not just romance. In that sense, it's also the kernel of The L Word. What do you think about the way lesbian sex has been handled on The L Word?**

GT: From an experience of writing lesbian sex in general, having to perform it, having brainstormed how to direct it, having directed it . . . it is *really* difficult to represent lesbian sex in a way that's different, hot, and clear as to what's going on. We've all seen close-ups of body parts and you're like, "Is that her ass and someone's elbow, or is that her neck and her thigh?"

**OOB: There might just be a wrist moving or something.**

GT: When we did *Go Fish*, when we sat there going, "Okay, we're going to make this hot," we were just like, "What do we do?" How do you, without being pornographic, represent lesbian sex? So, that said, I guess I worry that there's too much sex on *The L Word*. I've had people come up to me and say "God, there's so much sex; it's exploitative," and then other people being like, "Where's all the sex?"

**OOB: Let's talk about you playing, rather than writing or directing, sexy. You played a dominatrix once, right?**

GT: In *Preaching to the Perverted*, which just came out on DVD in America last year. The shit I'm wearing in that movie is incredible. You see my tits in it! I have fake nipple piercings. I've often wondered if I could be a high school teacher—because I'd love to be a high school teacher—if you can find naked pictures of me on the Internet. You could get accredited, but you'd be bummed because you'd know that eventually your students would look you up and be like, "Ha, ha, I saw your tits."

**OOB: In The Watermelon Woman, there's one really sexy sex scene of you. What was it like to shoot**

**that with Cheryl Dunye?**

GT: That was a rough one because it was actually the director that I was shooting with and her girlfriend, at the time, was the producer. We got under the covers, got a really limited crew in the room, and she was all, "What do you want to do?" and I was all, "Um, be directed in a sex scene." Nobody wants an un-sexy sex scene, so if there's something unflattering, it's not going to make it in. You only have to worry about what the editor thinks of you. It takes balls in the moment but not in the big picture.

I had to mimic giving a blow job in *Preaching to the Perverted*. I cried and threw up on that day.

**OOB: Are you serious?**

GT: I don't really have to give him a blow job, but I had to go beyond the frameline and pretend. I was like, "Why am I in England? Why do I have nipple rings glued to my nipples? But you know what's great about *Go Fish*? There's a montage of sex scenes with all of us, and in it, there's someone who has perfect tits and perfect nipple piercings. The way it's edited, it looks like they're my tits. So doing interviews, people would always ask, "Do you have your nipples pierced?" and I'm like, "Fuck, I wish my tits were that nice. I'll take credit for them."

**OOB: You were joking about becoming a school teacher? Do you still love what you do?**

GT: I'm so lucky. I almost always get to sleep as late as I want. I spend most of my time playing myself, writing about myself, or talking about myself. I take naps. I watch a lot of movies and read a lot of books—that's part of my job!

**OOB: You can write it off on your taxes!**

GT: When I go out in a lesbian context, that's pretty much my job too, to see what everyone's doing. So I get paid to do what I want basically, which is just great.