

A GUIDE TO LIVING BY ONE WHO HAS

Christopher Bollen

For our first issue, we had this idea—let’s do an in-depth interview with someone you might not have heard of. For this, we chose Joey Gabriel, muse to photographers Nan Goldin, Robert Mapplethorpe, David Armstrong and Jack Pierson. We chose Joey because if you met her, you would love her. We chose Joey because she came over to our office and within five minutes had taken her shoes off, asked how much we pay for rent, and let our dog out of his crate. Because when we showed her the layouts for this issue, she knew exactly who our influences were without asking. We chose Joey because she is so beautiful you can’t take your eyes off of her. Because she defies people’s definition of beauty. We chose Joey because going to visit a friend in the hospital, waiting for her at Grand Central, thinking you would miss her, she arrives amidst a sea of people carrying a giant bunch of bright yellow balloons to cheer up the day. We chose Joey because, as the article below proves, she has had a rough life, yet she always seems to cheer up the day. *Katherine & Skye*

At thirteen, Joey Gabriel left his home in the Baltic Sea port town of Lübeck and never came back. Blonde and girlishly skinny, he had been raised on American military bases in Germany through the 1960s and early ’70s. Joey was the second of three children, a loner even in a base community whose most stable feature is the impermanence of its residents. Joey knew, even so young, that he liked men, but hadn’t acted on it, not until he met Roberto in neighboring Bremerhaven. It was the end of May 1976, and he had just turned thirteen. Roberto was thirty-six, and looked like the American actor John Saxon. He was a merchant seaman who had found more permanent work on the docks of Plymouth, Massachusetts. Roberto went ahead. By the end of June, Joey was gone.

Like those who must fend for their own identities early in life, Joey had the mind and determination to know what he wanted and how to hold on to it, mostly by not letting go. “I knew what I wanted and I wanted him.” “I thought he was the sexiest thing I had ever seen. I pursued him. I told him I was sixteen.” The body was different then, and so were the times. Roberto had secured an apartment outside of Boston and Joey found in America what he had failed to in Germany. “I was going into Boston and had met other people like me. It was so great to get affirmation and finally feel attractive. People were interested in me and didn’t see me as a freak.” He wore designer jeans and had feathered blond hair, “disco fag”—style, popular with the waifs and miscreants of that Bicentennial summer. Joey hung out with street toughs, trans-gendered kids, the gay-for-pay, and the hustlers who packed Park Square, too young to go to the clubs, old enough to charge \$15 dollars for oral sex. The honeymoon period with Roberto had soon hit the skids, and would continue its bumpy unraveling of fights and jealous-

sies—Roberto wanting Joey to look more like a girl, Joey suspicious of his affairs with women—until they split for good two years later. Joey spent many nights in bus stations, occasionally hustling to support himself, often sleeping on the hot-air grates outside Liberty Mutual in a human jigsaw with the other teenagers. “It sounds icky now,” Joey admits. “But at that age it was really exciting and kind of fun.”

That first summer in the States, Joey went down to New York for the first time and was told to go to Fifty-Third Street and Third Avenue, the center of hustler activity. Notorious hustlers bars like Dallas, East Five Three, and Cowgirls defined the local color of the block. He went from the Port Authority and sat under a sequined sign that said “Paris Coiffures.” A john came up and propositioned him, and as they took the corner, the man said, “I’m sorry, kid, but you’re under arrest.” Joey thought he was kidding until an undercover car pulled and he was placed in the back seat. One of the cops grabbed his cheek and said, “This one’s so pretty I wanna keep him for myself.” Soon he was taken to the 17th Precinct and dropped in “the fruit tank” with the other night’s arrests. The queens and fags who slowly filtered in told Joey to find a seat on the bench and not let anyone take it. One queen named Rhonda, high on Black Beauties, spent the entire night corn-rowing her hair, undoing it, then doing it again. One big black queen came in late looking for room on the bench to sleep. Finding it full, she took off her high heels, lay down on the floor, propped her head on her heels, looked at her cellmates and said, “Fuck you’s all.” Only thirteen, Joey remembers being searched by a matron because he was too young for the male cops. “She was shocked by my lack of pubic hair, but because of my age, instead of homophobia, I was handled with compassion.” When he was released the next day, he and another boy went down to

St. Mark’s Theater, which cost a dollar and never closed, to sleep there while Ciao Manhattan played over and over. And that was New York to him.

Eventually Joey acquired a fake ID and came to New York regularly, going to the Crisco Disco and the Ice Palace, places best described as “what you think of when you hear a Sylvester song—shirtless fags with gold tambourines and gold fans, doing poppers and blowing whistles.” By the late ’70s, disco fag turned hard into punk. Joey briefly moved to Amsterdam in 1979. In this mecca of gay tourism and young European boys for hire, he worked in a male whorehouse called The Witz right off the Outdekerk. Most nights, he sat on a bar stool wearing white denim hot pants and jelly shoes, his white-blond hair tucked into a Greek sailor’s cap. “I didn’t have any ties,” Joey remembers. “When you’re working in that kind of environment it’s all very transitory and there was an opportunity.” He stayed in Amsterdam for the summer, living and working at the bordello. It was also the summer that he began traveling London to catch the punk bands. There must have been some future he saw in that scene, because when he returned to Boston in early autumn, he changed friends, stopped hanging out in gay clubs, and started spending time in rock clubs.

It wasn’t long until Joey was living in the abandoned squats of Queensberry Street in the Fenway area. These were home to the kids of the music scene. Joey was famous for being the most extreme in a young army of fashion extremes. At one point he honed a Billy Idol look pre- the Idol himself. Later he caught the New Romantic trend, never leaving the house without two hours of makeup, lace headdresses, and velvet knickers. In one Queensberry squat, the freaks lived on the top floor and the skinheads took the bottom floor. It was relatively peaceful among the warring subcultures. There was one guy who lived down the street named John. He was notorious in the Fenway area because he was one of the first punks in Boston. He had been a roadie for the Buzzcocks, worked as a welder, and cut a rather intimidating figure, even on Queensberry, even among the skinheads who were all terrified of him. Joey and his friends, known locally as “the powder-puff queens” because they spent most of their day putting on makeup, often sat out on the stoop to pass the time. One day John passed by in leather pants, combat boots, and a signature snarl. “He seemed a lot older, but he must have been twenty-six.” They were about to run into the house, but they didn’t, and John walked up to Joey and asked if he wanted to come over and listen to records. Joey thought this guy was going to murder him, but egged on by his friends, accepted. They listened to the X-Ray Spex (John liked the original punk bands like the Sex Pistols, the Dead Boys, The Damned, and Sham 69). He asked if Joey wanted to live with him. It was a nice studio and there was food, so once again he accepted. John had a small twin bed, it was winter, and before long they were having sex. John had just gotten one of the popular Boston punk girls pregnant, and she would be screaming down on the street outside. They were roommates and lovers of the incompatible kind. John didn’t like the amount of time Joey spent putting on makeup in the morning and soon started changing his look—combat boots, plaid pants, the “Oi Boy” aesthetic. “To me everything is drag, everything is a uniform, so I got a punk haircut and got rid of all my powdered wigs and started going out with him.” They hung out at the premier punk club, the Rathskeller in Kenmore Square. The Boston gossip machine went crazy, Joey and John being big fish in a small pond. John endured a lot of fights defending their situation. “I thought he was a nice boy,” Joey says, “But I didn’t have any heavy feelings for him. It wasn’t love. After Roberto there was a gap of fifteen years. By the time I adopted a punk look, I was inaccessible to other men too. Gay men didn’t like me. I found them attractive but I knew it wouldn’t work. When I did go home with a man, he would say there is something odd about me. They were used to effeminate men but not feminine men. All my experiences with gay men were complete failures, although they were my

bread and butter.” Real romance wouldn’t come back into Joey’s life until a different transformation turned him into a woman.

He went to Berlin in 1982, ended up getting stuck there, and fell back on what he was used to doing for money. He worked the Bahnhof Zoo Station. At the advice of his fellow hustlers, Joey got the most business when he wore lipstick and false eyelashes, although still dressed as a boy. “German men are really twisted.” He stayed for six or seven months, sleeping behind the Imbiss snack bars with the other tricks and searching out the local music scene. “It was a good time, a certain zeitgeist. I feel sad for people who have never experienced being at the right place at the right time.” He finally returned to Boston and found his first legitimate job, working in a restaurant. If a restaurant can be a zeitgeist, the 29 on Newbury Street behind the Ritz Carlton was it. Not exactly for the nouvelle cuisine, or “cocaine food,” as Joey and his friends called it, nor for the famous actors who ate there when passing through. The attraction was the staff. Joey started out as a busboy but soon ended up in the kitchen. He did the salads. David Armstrong worked the dessert station. Jack Pierson was a waiter. Richard Morrell was the chef. “A lot of interesting characters worked there.” Many of these characters would ultimately be life-long friends.

Joey was going to New York a lot at this time, spending nights at Area and Danceteria, catching sights of Warhol and Dianne Brill, finding his own group of friends in Manhattan, and then finally, in 1985, leaving Boston to live in New York. “Of course I didn’t have any money, so I started doing what I knew how to do.” Fifty-third Street wasn’t happening anymore; the hustler bars had closed in the midst of AIDS crisis. The boys worked the hangars of the Christopher Street Piers. Joey lived out of cheap hotels like the Jane West Hotel on the West Side Highway, famous for once housing the Titanic survivors. The first man Joey found interesting was a man named Ray who was driving by in tow truck. He was covered with tattoos, sported a handlebar moustache, and, Joey would soon learn, was a member of the Hell’s Angels. “Our relationship wasn’t much of a relationship. I don’t think he knew my real name. He just called me kid.” Once Ray drove him to Philadelphia and holed him up at the Hell’s Angels’ headquarters, telling everyone Joey was his cousin. Joey escaped with help from a biker girl with bleached hair and blue mascara named Tiger who gave him twenty bucks and showed him the way to the bus station. The relationship with Ray was a highlight of the mid-80s, mostly because there were feelings for him, even if it was lust. Ray was one of the first men Joey ever had intercourse with (oral sex was the hustler’s act). “I hadn’t felt anything like that for a long time. I still look for him when I walk around over there, driving his tow truck onto the sidewalk. He’s probably in jail or dead.”

Although the male escort fantasy of the 80’s was preppy and collegiate, admittedly not the best look for Joey to work, he soon joined Phillip’s All-Stars escort service. The clientele was rich, and one of them would end up changing Joey’s life forever. Tim was 33, married, worked on Wall Street, and lived on Long Island. After just a few dates, he asked Joey if he would see him exclusively and he agreed. The money was good and then it was ridiculously good. Tim had an apartment on Beekman Street by the South Street Seaport but his company also kept a suite at the Waldorf Towers. Joey lived there for six months, amid the dining rooms and pianos and three bedrooms that looked out of the forty-seventh floor. The schedule went like this: Joey saw Tim on Mondays and Thursdays. The rest of the time was his, and he filled it by traveling—first alone in first class and then economy with a second ticket for friends like David. Joey went to France, Spain, Italy, Brazil, Argentina... On one trip to Barcelona, he met a man named Andreas. “I knew never to shit where you eat. If I started dating someone in New York, Tim would find out. So I met someone in Spain.” In all, Joey traveled to Barcelona thirty-four times in five years. Andreas was twenty-nine and had never been with a boy before.

He was a former Mr. Barcelona and a weightlifter who worked as a fitness trainer. They kept the affair going, passing over the Atlantic like mere trips down the Eastern Seaboard.

Back in New York, Joey's lifestyle was fast and getting faster. Tim was giving him \$9,000 a month and then extra spending money on top of it, with the use of credit cards on top of that. "There was no way to count how much," Joey says, although eventually, years later, someone would count how much. Language classes. Lunch for twelve at the Waldorf. Collecting antiques at auction. Tim secured Joey a loft in the East Village on Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue, and Joey filled the place with hundreds of thousands of dollars in antiques and overseas finds. For those versed in contemporary photography, the loft is something of a lodestone. David Armstrong shot many of the portraits there that would later appear in his monograph *The Silver Cord*. Joey met Nan Goldin through David and she too shot there—some of her first photographs, intimate portraits bathed in afternoon light. Joey had served as a photographer's model before—David had shot a few portraits back in Boston—but it was at this time that he really began to serve as a muse to the art photographers on the scene. He was even once, in 1988, shot by Robert Mapplethorpe. Joey had known Robert's brother, Edward, through a girl who worked at Pat Field. Edward used to borrow his brother's studio on Bond Street to shoot his own work, and he once asked Joey to sit with him. When Robert saw the results, he also wanted a sitting with Joey. "It was right before he died," Joey remembers. "He looked creepy—wheelchair-bound and thin. But he had a bunch of acolytes there, the black men who had been his lovers and who were looking after him." Joey posed in front of the light gray background that infects the photographer's later shots, and he told her where to turn. "He was flawless. He was very quick. Everything about how he shot was so precise. He didn't work on energy like Avedon. He worked on structure." Joey's days as art muse had only just begun.

Tim wasn't the only New Yorker who would transform Joey in impossible ways. In 1987, he also befriended International Chrysis, a legend of the downtown scene, a pre-op transsexual who looked like Rita Hayworth and had traveled a similar road as Joey, leaving home young, getting to life fast. They met at the Boy Bar, and became instant friends. "She was one of those people you meet and you know you'll never meet anyone like them again. She changed the way I thought. I always had it but she fine-tuned it: an appreciation for the sicker things... She was like a showgirl. She always looked like she just popped out of a cake." Chrysis had been a muse for Salvador Dali, had performed all through Paris and on Broadway and at the Jewel Box Revue and Club 82, had introduced Joey to the Stone Wall queens like Sylvia Riviera and Marsha P. Johnson (Antony Hegarty would one day name his band after the latter). Joey would call Chrysis in the morning and ask her, "What are we going to do today?" Chrysis would tell him to meet her at the "day room," which was Sheraton Square Park, which, to her, looked like the Bellevue day room because it was where all of the queens hung out. Then they'd drift up to the movie theaters in Times Square, watching old karate films and laughing with the crackheads that lived in the theater full time. The duo went to Berlin in 1989, the same month The Wall came crashing down. Chrysis started to get sick. After they returned, Joey spent Christmas in Brazil and got a telephone call saying that Chrysis was in the hospital. He flew back instantly to be with her. Chrysis died a month later, at age 39, official cause of death listed as liver cancer. Her memorial service was held at the church across the street from the United Nations, drawing more than four hundred guests. Some of the queens wrote Chrysis's name in glitter and sequins on the sidewalk. Because she was the queen of the costume, attendees did the honors of dressing up. Joey wore his Hamlet Costume, which consisted of a 17th-century jet-beaded doublet, black velvet breaches, diamond buckles on patent-leather shoes, and a big black velvet hat decorated with an egret feather. David shot

a portrait of some of Chrysis' close friends that day, looking like dignitaries from an exotic foreign country that had, in many ways, lost a founding mother. Chrysis had been instrumental in converting a lot of the queens in New York. She gave many of them their first estrogen shot. The simple fact is that Joey would never have made her gender transformation if she hadn't met Chrysis. "The queens I met before her had bad teeth, lived in hotels, had bad wigs and B.O. Because of her, I realized they could be glamorous and beautiful and do extraordinary, fabulous things and not have subversive existences."

A year after Chrysis' death, Joey began taking estrogen injections, which she received every three weeks from a doctor in London Terrace. "It just clicked," she says by way of explanation. "The decision felt really natural. A lot of my friends said it was the most conventional thing I ever did." Depending on who you read, there is, or is not, something "natural" about gender identity in the first place, something assigned rather than possessed. There are male and female, and between them, a limitless shift that moves in endless transition, like water or space. It may have been something that "clicked" in 1991, but Joey seems to have been shifting her whole life. Sure enough, when he first went to the psychiatrist, he was given an onslaught of Masters & Johnson's tests that analyze drives and fantasies to assess how a patient fits on a barometer of transgenderism. "One of the things my psychiatrist said was, 'transsexuals want to be the opposite of what they are.' My condition was more obscure. It was called an androgyne. She said, 'you aren't transsexual. You are a person completely indifferent towards their gender.' I never really wanted a vagina, and I never wanted to become a woman. It just made more sense this way for me. It still works for me to see it that way." Like Chrysis, Joey took the state of pre-op [a flawed term in that 'pre' supposes an end result of 'post'], which she is to this day. "A lot of girls we knew ended up getting sex changes even if it wasn't right for them, because, until recently, there was such an emphasis on being black or white. But Chrysis used to say, 'gray is a beautiful color, too.' She was so open about being a she-male and made no bones about it. Among most queens there was such an objective to get surgery and then your life would change. But knowing you are all right as you are is a resignation that's very helpful."

The estrogen changed Joey physically. Her breasts and hips filled out, she lost muscle definition. She dressed very androgynously at the time, growing her hair out. Instead of being frightened, "it was like being born again, a Renaissance. Like going through puberty all over again." But the estrogen also changed her emotionally. "Any hormone does. You behave like a pregnant woman. You cry at Kodak commercials. You feel edgy. You can be curt and moody. It changes your libido, too. I was never a very libidinous person to begin with. It's so stereotypical, but as a gay man I felt more comfortable having anonymous sex. Now as a woman, you begin to want to have relationships and connections with men." Tim, for one, didn't mind Joey's transition. "Most transsexuals are misfits as boys. I was an attractive male and had been very successful as a boy. Still, society doesn't let you forget. You try walking down the street as a boy with nipples and you're going to hear it." It helped that events would lead Joey to make most of her transition outside of the United States. "To be a transsexual in America is to be something pejorative. Luckily I was overseas, where there were men who were attracted to queens and didn't think of it as something to be ashamed of. Here there is an attitude that if you like queens and you're a man, that's your dirty little secret. Chrysis used to say that the only thing crazier than a drag queen is someone who likes them."

The events that led Joey overseas for what turned out to be almost two years—the whole time changing from Joey the boy to Joey the girl—began one day in 1992. Joey and Tim had been together five years. Tim told Joey he was having work problems and suggested she take one of her trips. Thinking nothing of it, she decided to go to Istanbul

and checked into the Sarah Bernhardt Suite at the Pera Palace with her twenty pieces of alligator luggage. She waited for Tim to call and he didn't. He had been arrested in a Wall Street money scandal, a charge of which he was later convicted with a four-year prison sentence. Joey had a little bit of money saved, but for the most part had nothing. She was stuck in Turkey and would stay there for the next six months. She quickly moved out of the Pera Palace and into a seedy hotel that turned out to be a brothel, where the Turkish girls would sit in the lobby watching Wheel of Fortune on TV. "I never understood it because to play Wheel of Fortune, you have to speak English and none of them did. I guess they were excited by the prizes." Joey would sit with them, waiting out the days and planning her next move. It wasn't simply the price of a plane ticket that kept her from New York. The government wanted to subpoena her to testify against Tim on the money she had received. And just as daunting, they wanted her to pay taxes on what they estimated as roughly two million dollars in gifts. "My situation in America was already fuzzy with taxes and passports. I was already flying under the radar." David and Nan were living in Berlin, so Joey went to stay with them.

Joey soon got a call from her mother saying that her father had died. "I kept in touch with my family. I still cared for them a great deal. His death hit me." It wouldn't be the last death in a family Joey hadn't seen since age thirteen. Her mother died a month later and her older sister committed suicide by shotgun a month after that. Andreas flew up from Barcelona to be with Joey. When Andreas arrived, he was shocked by Joey's new appearance. She had not told him about the transition and he called off the relationship pretty much immediately. "I was becoming a girl. He wanted to be with a boy. It was upsetting, but I understood it." Nan took photographs of Joey and Andreas in a room at the Hotel Askaniischer Hof. The hotel was recommended by Helmut Newton, who was hanging out in Berlin at the time and showing Nan the local whorehouses; the hotel was particular only in that "it was just what you expect from a hotel in Berlin. Very Cabaret." The Askaniischer Hof shots are now famous in the photographer's opus. In one, a blonde bombshell looks toward the camera with an arm draped over the back of a sofa; Andreas's naked body reclines in the background. In another, Joey curves her pillowy body over Andreas in bed, her finger toying with his lips. They are pictures now understood as parting shots.

Andreas was out now firmly of the picture. She had lost her loft on Fourteenth Street. Tim was in the clink. And she was broke. "I was stuck. Queen Elizabeth called that year her *annus horribilis*, and it was my horrible year as well. Everything had fallen apart." Nan had a gig to speak at a college in Hamburg, and Joey went with her. She discovered she liked the city, which reminded her of Lübeck in its port on the water, its maritime romance and history of sailors and prostitutes. Like Amsterdam, like Barcelona, like New York, Joey ended up staying. She worked at a transvestite cabaret on the Reeperbahn, where men would come in and buy the girls drinks. Every night, Joey wore a full-length fishnet catsuit. She got an apartment down the street in a warehouse, the policy being she had to stay out until four in the morning to reclaim her room. Easy enough, since most nights she worked until four, sleeping through the days. In Hamburg, she met a Spanish sailor named Alberto, a fisherman from Galicia, and quickly fell in love. Joey hated the job at the cabaret, mostly because the other girls who worked there were jaded queens from South America. "I always ask myself, why is it so many members of the transgender population are from Mexico or South America or the Philippines? I realize a lot of these girls pursue these lifestyles for socio-economic reasons. A lot come from Catholic countries where the worst things you can be is a fag. So being a girl is the way to make ends meet. The result is, they are very dysfunctional people." These queens hated her, largely because she spoke seven languages and could talk to the customers. She lasted about three months, before leaving Hamburg with Alberto. He left his

job on the boat, a "sweet soul, not very bright, very beautiful, although not exactly my type. He was younger, for one." They went to Milan with eleven Deutsch Marks in their pockets.

Annus Horribilis. She was on the streets of Milan during Christmas. She didn't even own a winter coat. When they arrived, she asked the cab driver where the girls worked and went there, but it was eight o'clock and Johns didn't start coming until two. They sat in a McDonald's and Alberto was terrified. Joey was afraid too. She had worked on the streets as a boy but not as a transsexual. "Gay men treat other men pretty well. Men treat women badly. But men treat queens the worst." As it turned out, Italian men were queen crazy. On the Via Cenisio, there would be hundreds of gorgeous queens naked under fur coats with constant cars driving up. If you told them you were a woman, they would keep going. Otherwise they stopped. Joey stayed at this for a few months, making decent money. Eventually, Alberto found a job on a boat back in Spain, and soon they flew to Barcelona. When she and Andreas met again, introducing each other's new boyfriends, she found the new boyfriend looked exactly like she had as a boy. "I was glad to see he was happy. I didn't tell him what the problem was—that we were broke and stuck." She ended up working the streets of Barcelona, a town notorious for vicious queens. A few years prior, South American prostitutes had taken over the streets of Europe, cut-throat practitioners so aggressive that local girls couldn't even work in their own cities. Spanish girls were the only ones who had performed a coup. But in order to work at the busiest area of Barcelona—the campo behind the soccer stadium—you had to be Spanish. El Campo was a huge empty dusty dirt parking lot with beautiful queens standing in a circle in the center. The cars were filled surprisingly not with older men but young guys. "There wasn't an element of danger at all. The boys were so cool about it, as if it was normal to go have sex with a queen before or after a club—all four of them." Joey couldn't work easily there at first because she wasn't Spanish, although the girls were more accepting because of her non-South American credentials. They let her trick near them, in a secondary spot. One particular girl named Monica took her under her wing. Monica looked like Jayne Mansfield, with long white hair and big breasts. She made the most money of the group. She could bring home \$2,500 each night, a considerable amount for street work (Monica appears on screen for a split second in Pedro Almadovar's *All About My Mother* during the El Campo scene). Alberto eventually found a boat job in his native Galicia, and they left Barcelona. Joey spent a few weeks with him and twelve other fishermen on a sardine boat. Clearly, it was time to get back to New York.

Alberto had never been to America and didn't speak any English. Joey saw her old friends, who had not seen her in nearly two years, shocked by her transformation. "They thought I had had plastic surgery. That's how different I looked. And I was a different person." But life was not the same in New York as it had been. Joey had been wealthy before, riding high on the money from Tim, and now that life was over. She and Alberto stayed in sleazy \$25 hotels on the Upper West Side. Joey tried to make money with an escort service, but Alberto thought America would bring new possibilities and demanded she not go back to prostitution. He was simple and naïve. She remembers once catching him at home watching *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the scene where the Neanderthals throw their first bones into the air and she remembers him turning and asking her how they had cameras back then. "I looked at him like, you're joking, but he wasn't. It didn't occur to him that those were actors. I mean, where do you even begin?" Alberto found a job as a dishwasher making \$30 a night. They were fighting all of the time, about work, about money, about the day in and day out of what had become of them, and Alberto grew extremely depressed. It wasn't long before he started doing dope. Joey wasn't used to being around drugs, but she, too, picked up the habit. They had an apartment on Thirtieth ▶ p. 78





This page: *Joey in Rome*, 1990. Photograph by David Armstrong
 Opposite page from upper left corner: *Joey at Berlin Zoo*, 1992. Photograph by Jack Pierson
Boston, 1981. Photograph courtesy of Joey Gabriel
Amsterdam, 1979. Photograph courtesy of Joey Gabriel
Joey and Andres in the Hotel Askanischer, Berlin, 1992. Photograph by Nan Goldin
Joey in Stockholm, 1992. Photograph courtesy of Joey Gabriel
Wallis Simpson as Madonna with the Christ child as a brooch, 2007. Collage by Joey Gabriel
Hurricane Joey, 1995. Photograph by Jack Pierson
 Page 79: *Joey as Marie Antoinette*, NYC, 1989. Photograph by David Armstrong

Street and Ninth Avenue, which friends called the “den of doom” because it was filled with bad energy since nine people had overdosed there. Joey’s black hole of heroin continued through the last of the ’90s. The fighting continued, and Alberto left, during a winter snowstorm, dope-sick and taking all the drugs they had with him, returning to Spain alone. Joey never saw him again. He died some time after from a heroin overdose. Later, she heard that Andreas had died of AIDS.

Slowly, in degrees, she got her life back together again. Nan and David had become famous in their field, and attention and money came from those early photographs. Joey took small jobs as a bartender in a club or assisting Nan, to keep herself afloat. “Through mutual friends Joey met Antony Hegarty [of Antony and the Johnsons], probably at the Pyramid. He was doing a show that was going to involve video by Charles Atlas. Antony asked Joey if she wanted to participate. She warned him that she wasn’t a performer, but Anthony wanted to record his idea of beauty. And that was Joey. “I adore him. Antony has a real sense of specialness about people. And I met a lot of friends through him who restored my faith, especially in transgendered people. I had met so many shady motherfucking assholes all over the globe. And then there were all of these great people, younger and talented.” There were twelve songs and twelve girls, during which each girl would stand on the stage’s turntable with the video feed of them projected onto an overhead screen. Joey was given the song *Hope There’s Someone*. That song was pushed as a big single on Antony’s second album, *I’m a Bird Now*, and they used Joey for the music video. In a black dress and fishnet stockings, Joey turns on a white bed, wrestling between shadows and light. The video rocketed overseas, the album helped Antony win the Mercury Prize, and in 2006 Joey and the other girls went on the European tour. “That was the most fun I had in a long time,” she says. “We were on the stage at the Olympia in Paris and I would try to impart on the younger girls that these were hallowed grounds—

Josephine Baker and Edith Piaf had performed here.” When Joey walked on stage and the first notes of *Hope There’s Someone* started, the crowd went wild. In one lyric of the song, Antony sings, “So here’s hoping I will not drown.”

Today Joey lives in a spacious loft apartment in Brooklyn, decorated with dolls and antiques and racks of clothes, with an old Greta Garbo movie playing on the television, the kind of *vie bohème* that now seems farther from Manhattan than her view of the city from her fifth-floor window. She seems happy and has a boyfriend and dresses to meet him for a date in the West Village. The art muse has now become an artist herself. What started out innocently as a small thank-you gift sent to a friend in London has transformed into its own passionate pursuit. “My friend showed the collage I made him around, and he really encouraged me to continue. He wants one day to present them as a show.” Joey’s *objet trouvé* collages are assembled images cleaved from old magazines and books. She picks the icons that have always inspired her. “People who are too eccentric, people who can’t exist anymore.” People like the exotic-dancer spy Mata Hari, the Italian heiress the Marchesa Casati, and the Russian silent-film star Alla Nazimova. Almost like Klimt or the medieval church painters, Joey covers her angelic figures in bright metallics, beatifying them with halos and gowns made from inks, sequins, and gold beads into three-dimensional relief. It’s as if Joey has given these legendary eccentrics, too extreme to be tolerated today, their final and most spectacular transformation into saints.

Joey never saw Tim again, but once in 1999, she phoned him. He was out of jail and still married, a fallen man working today as a school janitor. At the end of their conversation, he asked her if she had ever completed her transition. She told him she had, and he said, “I bet you’re really beautiful.”

