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CAMMIE TOLOUI



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144 Pages
94 Photographs
5 Dollars
3 Minutes

'5 Dollars for 3 Minutes'
by Cammie Toloui

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The Lusty Lady
 PHOTOS & TEXT
CAMMIE TOLOUI

Yeastie Girl

San Francisco at the time was abuzz with artists, musicians and radicals: the full spectrum of bohemianism. The city was a wild melting pot of eccentrics and color and life, and for a student photographer like me, the streets were a constant source of excitement and inspiration. The city had, and still has, a thriving gay community, but tragically AIDS

whole extended Iranian family was visiting for dinner. We locked the door of my bedroom, attracting the curiosity of my annoying kid sisters who pounded on the door to be let in. I knew vaguely that he needed to get on top of me and put it in and then we needed to move up and down a bit. After a few minutes of what we thought was coitus, we decided it would be more fun to go outside and play with all of my cousins in the backyard. Later that night I put a triumphant tick next to Sex on my list.

A year later, when I managed to seduce a hot 16 year old lifeguard at the pool by my house, I discovered painfully that David had not, in fact, popped my cherry, but the lifeguard most certainly did.

I went to high school in the soulless depths of a sprawling suburban town. I majored in photography and spent a lot of time venturing to San Francisco to take pictures of hippies, Gay Pride parades and the many protest marches against apartheid, Ronald Reagan and nuclear weapons. I went on to study art photography at San Francisco State University before realizing after a year that I was better suited to photojournalism.

My classmates in the art department were shooting abstract self-portraits and one of my professors had been a contemporary of Ansel Adams, devoting himself to the complicated Zone System. We spent one class examining his static black and white pictures of beach chairs in France. I felt vaguely out of place there with my portraits of grizzled burn-out hippies and shots of teenage skinheads starting fights with pacifist vegan punks.

It was after a particularly painful end-of-semester critique that I knew for sure I wasn't in the right place. Everyone's final projects were on display and discussed at length. One student presented a single image, lit dramatically and watercolored on the surface of the print to

I was conceived during the Summer of Love in San Francisco and grew up in Pacifica, a hilly suburb of the city. When I was around 8 years old, I bought a small camera at a garage sale and started taking pictures of my friends, my sisters and my cat. I was hooked.

One time I even stole film while at the grocery store with my mother. She caught me loading my camera with the cartridge film. I had lifted and she drove me back to Safeway where she made me apologize to the manager between breathless sobs. I wish I could tell you that this experience deterred the future me from doing deviant deeds for the sake of photography, but that would be a lie.

I grew up with a strict Iranian father who was religious and dominating. My reaction to this was to seek out progressively more extreme behaviors that I thought my dad would disapprove of.

As a rebellious pre-teen, I sat down and made a list of my life goals. It was pretty simple:

1. Sex
2. Drugs
3. Rock and roll

Number 2 on the list was easy in hippie San Francisco: I did some LSD and smoked a lot of pot in my early teens. Somehow I managed to avoid serious drug addiction.

My own sexual rebellion started at some point in my early single-digit years. I remember my father once telling me that god could hear all of my thoughts and knew everything that I did. That night as I was masturbating in bed, I thought about how god knew what I was doing with my fingers and in my mind I said, "Fuck you," to him (since he was listening) and had an instant orgasm from the excitement of breaking that silly taboo.

I started my period at age 10 and by 11 I had convinced my older boyfriend David that we needed to try having sex. Neither of us really knew how, but decided to give it a try. We chose the evening that my

symbolize her sadness over the loss of her dog, or something. I could feel my eyes rolling and my impatience growing.

For my final project I presented the pictures I had shot at my grandfather's funeral. He had come to America as a refugee from Iran in 1979 and knew only one word of English. "OK," he would say, or sometimes he would change it to "NOX"

It was an emotional gathering and the family dynamics were complicated. I realized my camera served as a helpful buffer as I moved among my Persian great-aunts and somber cousins. I thought my photos were impactful, emotional and beautiful.

When my turn came, I unfolded a large accordion-style handmade book with images of my family weeping, and my aunt throwing herself onto the descending coffin as my uncles struggled to pull her away. No one said a word. Even a harsh criticism would have been preferable to that silence. In that moment the realization hit me: I was in the wrong department.

So, I took myself over to the photojournalism department. And it was there that I first met professor Ken Kober, notoriously revered and feared by the students in equal measure. Ken's exacting standards pushed student photographers to strive for truth and excellence in their work. I knew immediately that here, my passion for documentary photography would be nurtured and challenged.

5 DOLLARS FOR 3 MINUTES

The project was photographed in the early 90s when Cammie Toloui was working as a stripper at the Lusty Lady Theater in San Francisco to fund her photojournalism degree at San Francisco State University.

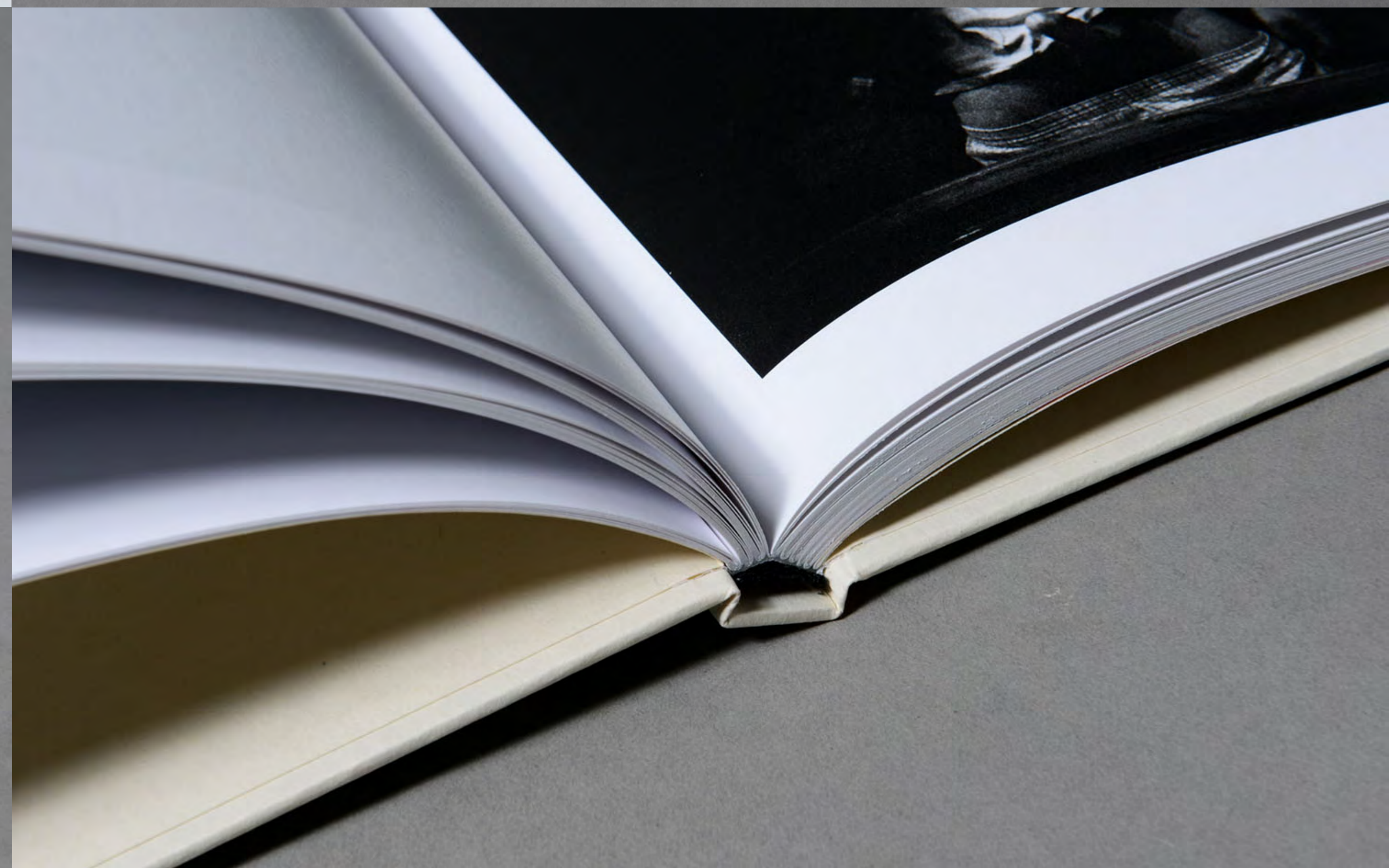
Customers who paid to view her naked body and watch her perform sex acts on herself were offered a discounted price if they consented to being photographed. The resulting series of black and white photographs, baroque-like in their dramatic lighting, are free of any prejudice. Instead, they are compellingly imbued with a deep sense of curiosity and understanding, with each photograph revealing a broad spectrum of sexuality, fetishes, and often-private aspects of masculinity.

“I smuggled my camera into work and got up the courage to ask my first customer if I could take his picture, offering him a free dildo show in exchange. He didn’t seem at all hesitant, and in fact I was shocked when he came back the following week, asking if I would take his picture again. This was an important lesson in the workings of the male ego and served me well for the next two years as a stripper, and the rest of my career as a photographer.”

— CAMMIE TOLOUI

Today, the series retains a deeply powerful urgency and importance because of how Cammie Toloui took control of and inverted the male gaze, turning it back on itself, at a time where the male gaze was an overarching dominant force within daily life, both culturally and socially.

Void is proud to publish this extraordinary body of work for the first time. Photographs from the series have been included in exhibitions at the Tate Modern in London, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, and Camerawork Gallery in San Francisco, among others.




CAMMIE TOLOUI

Cammie Toloui was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a degree in photojournalism from San Francisco State University, where she also taught photography.

Her work as a documentary photographer has taken her to Russia, inside ambulances, strip clubs, and other public/private worlds.

She was awarded the New York Times Award for Excellence in Photojournalism, The Greg Robinson Memorial Photojournalism Scholarship, and was honored to attend the Eddie Adams Workshop.

She continues to document her life and uncover taboos through her photography and creative activism.



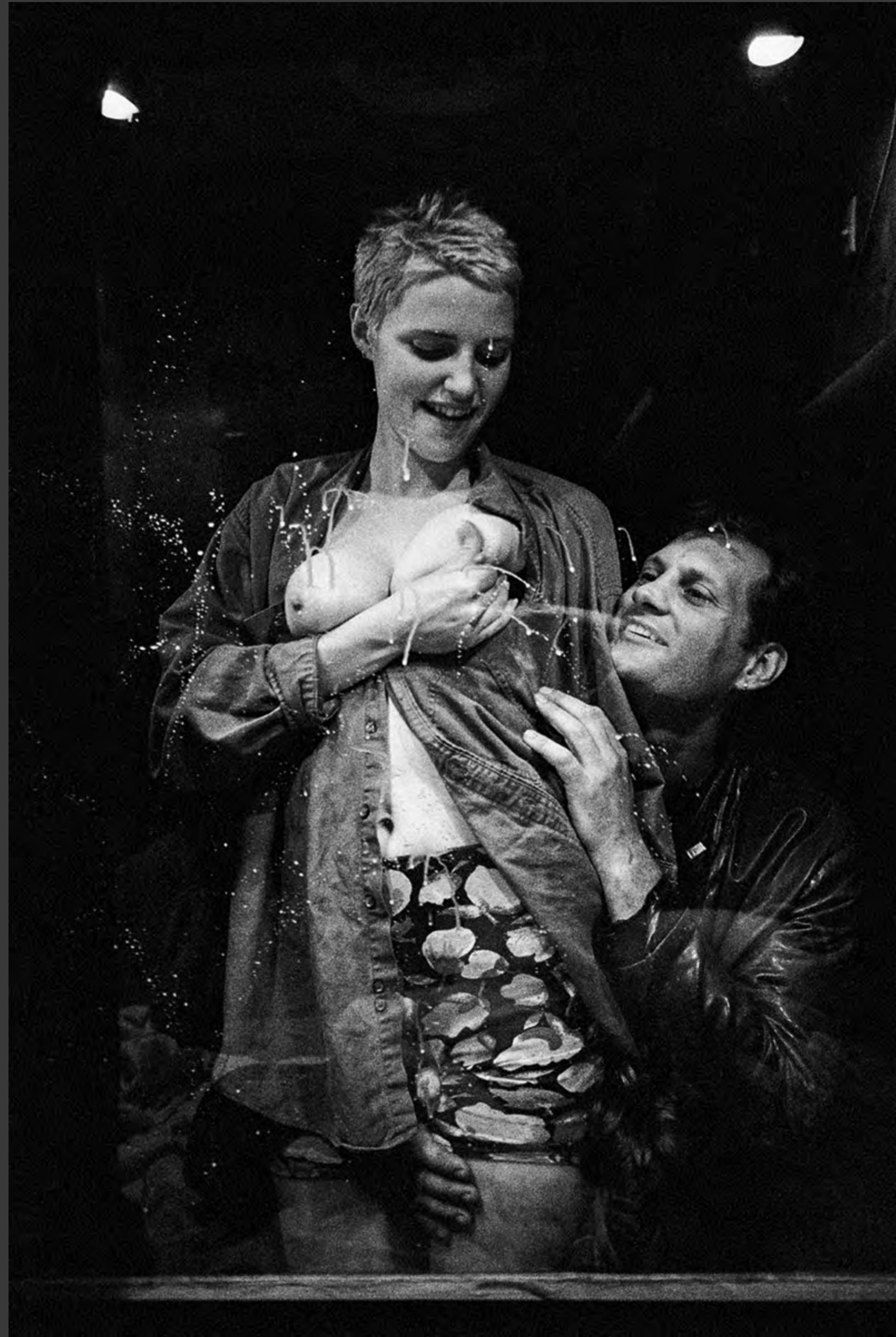
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Ms. Manners says:
When dancing nude on
Stage, it is the ^{WIDTH} height
of rudeness to be
Ouerdressed...

So pick a decorative
TOP or Bottom
Never Both!

Tanksalot, Ms. Manners
aka
Attila the Hun

VOID

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