



The Lincoln Memorial

ings, religious or otherwise, is an important part of the capital's life. This book makes clear that ours is not the first generation to fight

pitched battles over the messages conveyed by statues, museums, and memorials.

—AMY SCHWARTZ

CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS

THE WOMAN I WAS NOT BORN TO BE: A Transsexual Journey.

By Aleshia Brevard. Temple Univ. Press.
260 pp. \$24.95

This is the story of a small-town kid, growing up in the narrow-minded but not deliberately unkind Tennessee of the 1940s and '50s, dreaming of Hollywood and fame. She achieves minor stardom (shows at Finocchio's, almost-dates with Jack Jones and Anthony Newley, "pretty girl" parts on the *Red Skelton Show* and in the Don Knotts movie *The Love God*) and marries a few bad but not terrible men (one lazy, one gay, one far too young).

In her forties, she becomes a feminist and realizes that she will never be truly happy, or truly safe, if she keeps seeking validation and a sense of self from men: "I'd squandered valuable years in an attempt to become someone worthy of love." What distinguishes Brevard's book from the slight, feminist coming-of-age stories of the 1970s are passages such as this: "We made love in front of the roaring fire and later . . . fell asleep melded like two cherubs in a sugar-spun dream. The next morning, Hank and I went to the doctor's. I had a rectal tear."

Aleshia Brevard was born Alfred Brevard Crenshaw in 1937. "From my earliest years I'd known that something was wrong with me. . . . I felt that people kept treating me improperly. They did. They insisted on treat-

ing me as though I were a boy." Alfred had a sex-reassignment operation in 1962, when there were no transsexuals on talk shows and damned little expert surgery, and emerged as Aleshia. Her book straightforwardly describes pre-op life as a female impersonator (Marilyn Monroe once came to watch), the perfunctory "psychiatric" treatment before surgery ("He asked me if I thought I was a woman. I did. That was pretty much that."), the brutal and painful procedure of creating and using a new vagina, and her feelings upon becoming a woman. "My life began at Westlake Clinic on that day in 1962," she writes. "Gone was my 'birth defect.'"

The Woman I Was not Born to Be is not the kind of book one really expects from an academic press: no statistics, no elaborate theoretical structure. Nor is it the story of people whom history has utterly ignored. Mocked, crucified, tortured, and jailed, yes; ignored, no. But I'm glad Temple University Press chose to publish it: in academia as in real life, a reasonably well-adjusted, kind-hearted woman who was born male is not so common. If you're intimidated by such brilliant and accomplished transsexuals as economist Deirdre McCloskey, scientist Joan Roughgarden, and classical pianist Sarah Buechner, you can relax with Brevard. She is as unassuming, unthreatening, and sweet natured as anyone could ask.

—AMY BLOOM