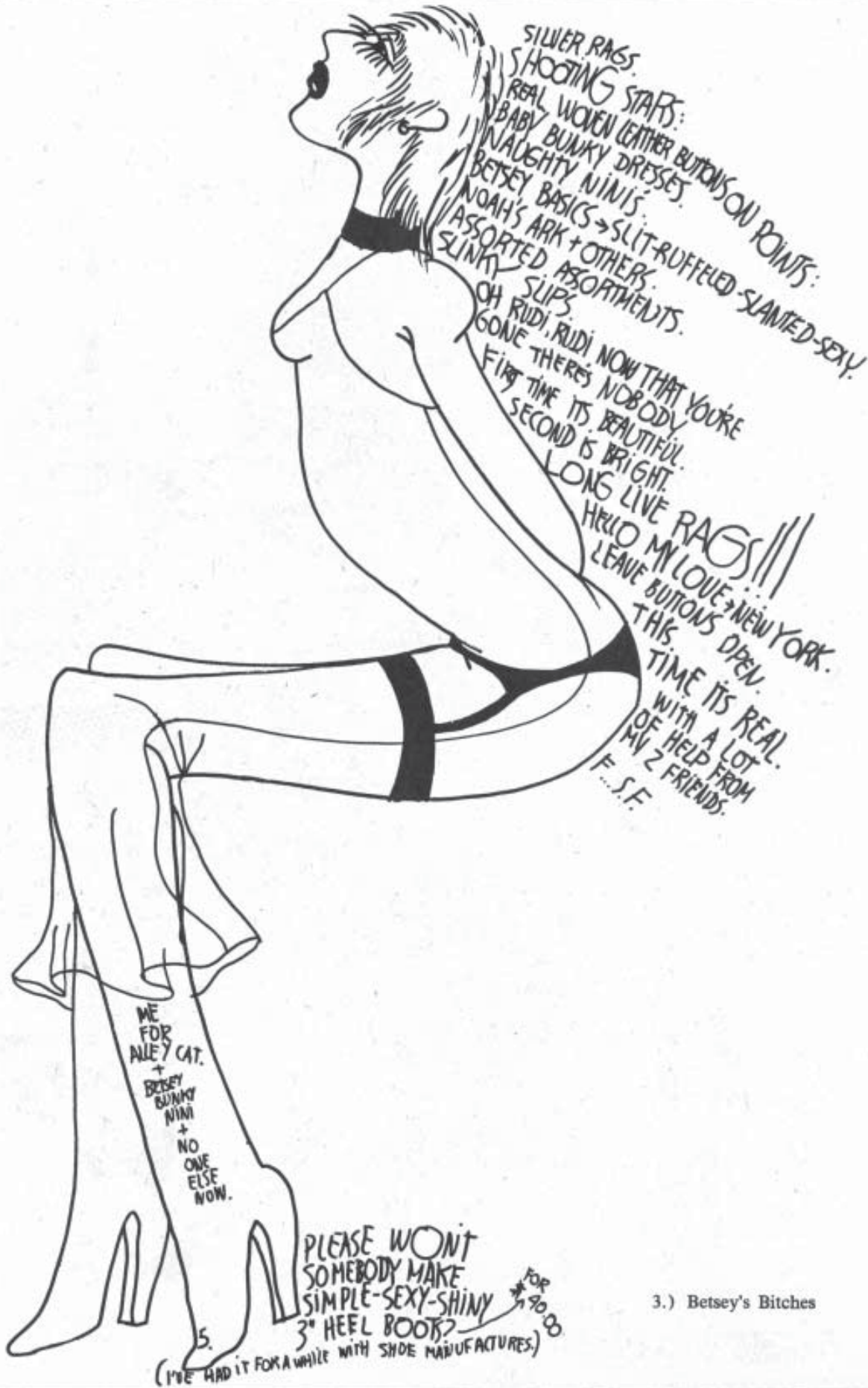


1.) Betsey by Betsey

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2.) Betsey, Bunky and Nini



3.) Betsey's Bitches

She's been fighting the creativity battle quietly for five years. Now she's just beginning to win it . . . and on her own terms.

The struggle started in 1965, with the birth of BETSEY JOHNSON NUMBER ONE DESIGNER at Paraphernalia. Her identity was immediately established with super individual styles: body clinging undershirts, skinny form fitting silhouettes, and micro-mini A-lines. An instant success story. Betsey was America's equivalent to Mary Quant . . . and then some. Almost everyone could relate easily to her streamlined styles. She became a "star."

But all of that glitter never really



turned to gold. Business relations on Seventh Avenue soured, and she in turn severed all Paraphernalia and Puritan Company ties that bound her. Mass Production and the Giant Rip-off Game stepped right in. Betsey was left out.

During the past three years she's run the gamut of designing deals, even taking on shoe styling. From Paraphernalia to Capezio to I. Miller to Alvin Duskin. She needed the bread, they needed her talent. Sadly, all the relationships were short-lived. Again and again it was a question of creative control vs. the restrictive demands of mass marketing.

In the Spring of 1969, Betsey and a couple of her friends, Bunky Washburn and Nini LaTorre, opened a boutique in New York. *Betsey, Bunky & Nini*, a happy fresh shop, quickly became the salvation for many clothes freaks, and a barometer for famished fashion followers, since so much of what they carry today appears in knock-off-land tomorrow. On nearly any given Saturday afternoon, "ripper-offers" from the manufacturing world show up in their business suits to peruse the place. Something catches their eye, they buy it. "The right size,



rip-off?" "Doesn't matter, I'll take it . . ." Says Betsey, "Those rip-offs of my stuff help me gain new confidence in myself. Besides, my whole design thing is so personal, from the buttons to the thread color in the seaming, that no firm could ever really knock me off. They don't have the special fabrics and they drop the important details."

But the shop could hardly support the sum of Betsey's creative output. She turned to Seventh Avenue for another try at the larger market. This time she's found a junior sportswear firm, Alley Cat, which has offered her much of the freedom she always wanted. She designs an imaginative line for them, and at the same time keeps whipping up beautifully bizarre one-of-a-kind delicacies for *Betsey, Bunky & Nini*.

The idea of a dual life — her



straighter Seventh Avenue side, and her far-out boutique side — comes easily for Betsey. She dreams up her best things just sitting around in a leotard and pants; she admitted that she's lived a whole week in a single outfit! "When you're so involved in making patterns, colors and forms,

searching for the final touches, you hardly have time to worry about yourself." Her largest charge is to see a regular chick out on the street in her clothes: "I don't dig all the hype of a full page in a national fashion slick showing Raquel Welch in my stuff . . . who cares?"

Betsey has energy to spare—hard work is part of her genius. She'll take the trouble to pursue unlikely sources for just the right fabric, and she'll stand by production people in the factory to make sure they use the absolute best shade of thread for a critical seam. "I guess I run on insecurity, yet at the same time I have a



strong belief in what I'm doing."

So, thanks to Alley Cat, Betsey is on her way again. For the first time she is doing an entire line herself. Everything she designs gets made into a sample and hung in the showroom. What eventually sells, of course, might be another story. Something that impresses hard core individualists might not at all impress the buyer from a department store chain. But the important thing is that clothes by Betsey Johnson are once more available; they were then, and are now, an experience to wear, a joyous reflection of our times. 🐾