



A robe of one's own

BY AIMEE LEE BALL

In the pale dawn of a new day, I am put out of kilter as much by the wrong robe as by a muddy brew of coffee, and some nights when the world has been mean and hard, I feel I've been away from my robe too long. If mashed potatoes are the consummate comfort food, then the bathrobe is the ultimate in comfort clothes—the adult extension of a security blanket. Caftans and sweatsuits can provide physical comfort, but a bathrobe is a return to the womb.

Consequently, there are seven—count 'em, seven—bathrobes hanging in my closet. This is, I am willing to admit, more in a lounging wardrobe than a person really needs. The excess speaks to my ongoing search for the perfect robe and my reluctance to consign imperfect models to the rag heap.

My current favorite is imprinted with fried eggs, bacon strips and grapefruit halves (with maraschino cherries). I bought it for my favorite teenager and then was consumed with such lust for it that I had to have one myself. It makes me happy on weekend mornings but is too kitsch for a steady diet.

My flu robe is blue-plaid flannel—sort of a blankie with lapels—perfect for the time when I am ready to move from my sickbed to the sofa. (This is about the same stage of the flu that I am able to switch from tea and toast to solid food, and from TV to books.) I have a beloved travel robe, made of a waffled, white French cotton similar to a thermal blanket and adaptable to the vagaries of hermetically sealed hotel rooms. And I have been able to introduce a thick terry-cloth after-bathrobe to my life now that I live in an apartment with a washer and dryer—it used to be unbearable to lug such a thing to the laundromat, where it cost about \$40 to clean.

Often I stalk my prey in men's departments, where I am more likely to find the clean, androgynous lines of a wrap- or kimono-style in luxurious but unfussy fabrics, the sort of robe I imagine Katharine Hepburn might have worn on Sunday mornings with Spence. Perhaps men developed proper robbery because they've always gone out into the world to slay dragons and needed the psychic retreat of a good bathrobe at home. With women becoming equal-opportunity dragon-slayers, we need equivalent succor. No woman I know wants to curl up and

watch *Murphy Brown* in a robe trimmed with marabou feathers. The sexiest robe I know is a thin mantle of man-tailored silk foulard.

Since there are many days when I do not have to check in at any office, take any meeting or even show my face in public, there is a lurking danger of staying in a robe all day, eating

canned tuna like something out of a *Honeymooners* rerun. I guard against bathrobe abuse by setting and enforcing strict guidelines about getting dressed at least some part of every day.

The definitive bathrobe would be ankle-length cashmere, the color of creamed coffee, like an oversized cardigan. But it may be unreasonable to ask one garment to answer all our bathrobe needs—our sick-day, end-of-day, Saturday and Sunday bathrobe needs. The perfect robe is no less chimerical than the perfect apartment, the perfect meal—or the perfect man.

ROBES

are arriving in

all shapes and sizes. On the one hand, they're short and ruffled. On the other hand, tailored styles—often in gentlemanly stripes and plaids—are also quite evident