

SCENE - ACT I, Scene 2 - “The Conspirator”
From the Play *Dualing Hero* by Justy DeForest

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Characters:

M-Hero – Hero, now a male. A young man of Sestos, age 30.

Keles – Cousin of the former female Hero’s drowned lover, Leander. A young man of Abydos, age 25.

Setting: *A small chamber in the Council Hall of an anachronistic Sestos, where the mindset and conveniences of the Contemporary West alternately converge and clash with those of Ancient Thrace.*

Background: *It is exactly one year after a female Hero threw herself into the Hellespont after the drowning of her lover Leander and was turned into a man by the Sea Godde Poseidon. A male and member of the city-state’s Council since his “Blessed Transformation,” Hero now prepares to be sworn into office as President of Sestos. He knows that the High Priest disapproves of his “radical” agenda of progressive reforms and rightly suspects that the cleric plans to use Keles, a newly arrived visitor from Abydos and Leander’s cousin, to somehow block tomorrow’s inauguration.*

M-HERO

Tell me, Keles. Why has the High Priest brought *you* here *now*?

KELES

(nervously) Brought?! – I came of my own accord. – to meet the lady Leander lost his life to love.

M-HERO

As you can see, that *lady* no longer exists.

KELES

When Leander spoke of a feminine Hero, he praised her brain as well as her body. The form may be lost, but the wits remain.

M-HERO

What's your point?

KELES

The essence of that Hero still resides in you!

M-HERO

Walking on the other side of sex alters one's perception of the world. My name is the same, but I have changed in more than just appearance. I'm no longer that person I was a year ago, and it's no use pretending otherwise.

KELES

There came a point during those months Leander swam across the Hellespont that I imagined myself doing the same...and for a similar reason. Then the night of the storm came, and he was gone. I've spent a year grieving for a cousin who was as dear to me as a brother — and looking for someone to blame! I didn't know about the "Blessed Transformation" until we met this afternoon.

M-HERO

So why did you come to Sestos?—To declare your love for a female Hero or to wreak vengeance upon her?

KELES

I figured that where there is wit, there are wiles.— Like the sirens whose songs lure sailors to their deaths.

M-HERO

A siren does not love the sailor she lures.

KELES

No. *(Pause)* You mentioned Leander would not be dissuaded from swimming the Hellespont that night. So you talked to him beforehand?

M-HERO

Talked...reasoned... pleaded...threatened...cried!

KELES

I assumed you had demanded. *(Pause)* Then, what the High Priest said is true. Leander's death was no more than an avoidable mishap.

M-HERO

We who loved him will always consider it a tragedy.

(M-HERO places his hand on KELES's shoulder. KELES gives M-HERO a pat on the back and hurriedly walks away.)

KELES

But why didn't the High Priest tell me of your transformation when he phoned?

M-HERO

He phoned you?

KELES

(backtracking awkwardly)

Returned my call...I had left a message.

M-HERO

(eyes KELES suspiciously)

No doubt he intends to use you to protect the city-state.

KELES

(nervously) From what?

M-HERO

A monster brazen enough to question a godde's motives and bold enough to challenge the status quo.

KELES

Isn't it too late for that? You're being sworn in as President tomorrow morning!

M-HERO

Unless he can find a way to prevent it tonight.

KELES

What makes you so sure he wants to?

M-HERO

You have noticed he's not the most progressive prelate? He's been trying to catch me out since the day of the transition.

KELES

And he thought I wouldn't come to Sestos if I knew you were now a man?

M-HERO

Clearly, for his machinations to work, you must play an important role.

KELES

(half-jokingly) As what? — Leander's stand-in?!

M-HERO

(in complete seriousness) Over whom I will undoubtedly swoon, thus revealing that the *essence* of Hero, as you put it, remains feminine.

KELES

To what end? The Council has already acknowledged wennen's right to vote,—

M-HERO

But not to hold public office.

KELES

Like the Presidency of Sestos!

M-HERO

(nods) That proposal is still on the table.

KELES

So he wants to use me to stop the orderly transition of power? *(Pause)* – That makes no sense! I now know you're a man, and I'm not gay.

M-HERO

Neither am I.

KELES

So nothing will happen between us! Even if we were...

(He is clearly uncomfortable with this topic.)

...so inclined, men do fall in love with each other occasionally. – and some of them hold elected office.

M-HERO

Cisgender men may fall in love with each other, but even then, their manhood is called into question. I'm *transgender*. -- *Transsexual*, actually..

KELES

But your transition was the work of a godde! The High Priest, himself, called it "blessed"! And I assume you're fully functional, unlike other transmen.

M-HERO

(offended and amused at once.)

Yes, Keles! I am...fully functional.

KELES

Sorry! I was thinking out loud.

M-HERO

So many do!

KELES

My point is no one can question *your* transformation.

M-HERO

I question it, myself. What was the real reason Poseidon turned me into a man? – and why with the words, “Because I love you!”

KELES

Honestly, Hero, the Sea Godde’s pronouncement doesn’t sound so cryptic as any from the Oracle of Delphi. The High Priest’s interpretation is the obvious one.

M-HERO

And what is “obvious” about it, Keles?

KELES

(uncomfortably) Well, you know!

M-HERO

Tell me.

KELES

Common knowledge holds that males are superior to femeles.

M-HERO

(flatly) Common knowledge is right up there with conventional wisdom!

(Awkward pause)

KELES

Look, Hero, I applaud your championing the cause of wennen. Someone had to do it, sooner or later! But, for the time being, maybe you should just accept this gift at face value.

M-HERO

Play along? Be one of the boys?

KELES

Exactly!

M-HERO

That's your advice? – Maintain the status quo?!

KELES

What's so wrong with that?

M-HERO

Asks a man who has never had to forfeit his form to fulfill his function!

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