

DUALING HERO

By

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DUALING HERO

Dramatis Personae

NOTE: As the playwright uses Trailblazing English out of a commitment to linguistic justice, readers will encounter a few unfamiliar words and alternative spellings in this script, none of which will impede understanding of the drama.

- * M-Hero: Male, early 30s. The present Hero of flesh and blood. Serious and driven. A progressive member of the Council of Sestos since the “Blessed Transformation” and current President-Elect of the city-state. Wears contemporary professional business attire, at once cutting edge and no-nonsense.
- * F-Hero: Femele, early 30s. The memory of the former femele Hero, now a disembodied feminine gender identity. A frustrated, ethereal entity, she retains her all-too-worldly ambitions and desires with no outlet for them. Wears a long pale Grecian gown.
- The High Priest of Sestos: Male, mid-60s. Staid, pompous, and an ultra-conservative upholder of the status quo. Wears a robe of ancient style that unmistakably announces his high office to all.
- Keles: Male, mid-20s. A visitor from Abydos and the cousin of Leander, the drowned lover of the former femele Hero. A paradoxical young buck of open congeniality and guarded intention, he is wending his way between taught values and observed reality. Wears sporty contemporary clothing and ports a leather satchel nonchalantly slung over his shoulder.
- Mysia: Femele, late 20s. A forward-thinking young wenn of Sestos, focused, politically astute, and assertive. M-Hero’s former campaign manager, she is his trusted confidante and bride of six months. Wears classic contemporary clothing with a distinctive personal flair.

* *As the characters of F-Hero and M-Hero are the same person of different sexes, the actors who play them should be similar in size and appearance.*

DUALING HERO SYNOPSIS

DUALING HERO is based on a version of the Hero and Leander tale in which Hero does not die after throwing herself from her tower following her lover's drowning, but is turned into a man by Poseidon. The reason given: Because the godde loved her. The action takes place one year after Hero's transformation.

In an anachronistic Sestos, President-Elect M-HERO, is summoned to the Council Hall by the HIGH PRIEST on the day before his scheduled inauguration. He is to recount the tale of his "Blessed Transformation" to a visitor who turns out to be Leander's cousin, KELES. Hero's female memory, F-HERO, seen and heard by M-Hero alone, is also present. She ogles Keles, mocks the High Priest, and reminds her male "clone" that *she* is the *real* Hero who wrote the progressive proposals *he* is now getting credit for. When the ultra-conservative cleric insists that the two men stay the night at Hero's abandoned tower, M-Hero sees a plot to place him in a compromising situation so that his inauguration will be cancelled. He phones MYSIA, his recent bride, and asks her to meet them at the tower.

Later, in the tower bedchamber, F-Hero, enamored with Keles, tries to reawaken M-Hero's feminine inclinations by reminding him of passionate nights spent there with Leander. She fails and vanishes. Mysia enters, wary of competing with the memory of Leander. M-Hero assures her their future together is what matters now. In the tower library, Keles reviews a female Hero's many notebooks as F-Hero watches. He finds an old prayer in which she had asked Poseidon to find a way for her to present her proposals to the male-only Council *without* robbing the councilmen of their free will. Keles realizes this request could be granted only by turning Hero into a man. He decides to show the prayer to the Council and then return to Abydos, as he can't love a memory. F-Hero admits that, without her body, she and Keles cannot be together. She laments, "I am no longer Hero!"

At dawn, F-Hero reappears to M-Hero and tells him she is going away forever. M-Hero protests, revealing his wish to sometimes see *her* reflection in the mirror. He observes, "We have become sibling selves." They decide to let Poseidon reconcile their gender duality and leap together from the tower window just as Mysia enters the bedchamber. She runs to the window, crying "Why?"

On the shore, Mysia, Keles, and the High Priest gather. When a flesh and blood F-Hero emerges from the sea, the cleric gloats that she cannot take the oath of office. When she shapeshifts into M-Hero, the High Priest demands that *they* perform the duties of president in male form only. When Hero reveals the final gift of Poseidon, Sense Shaping, *willing* Keles to see F-Hero and Mysia to see M-Hero simultaneously, the High Priest must admit defeat. He says they'll go to the Council, which will proclaim women's right to hold public office. Then he'll swear Hero in as President in either form. Mysia decides to face the future with a dual-sexed spouse despite the challenges. Left alone on the beach, the High Priest secretly prays to Poseidon that Sestos peacefully becomes a society of inclusion.

DUALING HERO
SETTING PAGE

Place &
Time: The day before and day of the autumn equinox
 in the anachronistic city-state of Sestos in Thrace.

ACT ONE

Scene One: A small chamber in the Council Hall of Sestos, late in the
(pp. 1-18) afternoon on the day before M-Hero's inauguration.

Scene Two: The same small chamber in the Council Hall of Sestos,
(pp. 19-33) immediately following the end of Scene One.

Scene Three: The bedchamber of Hero's tower, that night.
(pp. 34-45)

ACT TWO

Scene One: The library of Hero's tower, just before dawn the next day.
(pp. 46-57)

Scene Two: The bedchamber of Hero's tower, just after dawn.
(pp. 58-72)

Scene Three: The beach in front of Hero's tower, just before nine o'clock
(pp. 73-97) that morning.

DUALING HERO

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

A Small Chamber in the Council Hall
of the anachronistic city-state of Sestos in Thrace

(Lights come up in a small chamber in the Council Hall of Sestos, late in the afternoon on the day before the autumn equinox. A door leading to the councilors' offices is located Downstage Right. A second door to the reception area is in the middle of the Stage Left wall. A rectangular table with two chairs placed behind it is positioned a few feet before the Stage Right wall. A third chair, facing the table, is placed slightly to the left of Center Stage. Although the furniture is of rich, well-polished wood, the chamber's ambiance is one of an interrogation room, giving the onlooker the uneasy feeling that someone is about to be given the third degree.)

The HIGH PRIEST, a staid man in his mid-60s, donned in cleric robes of ancient style, and carrying a dossier of official papers, enters from the door at Downstage Right with KELES, a "young buck" in his mid-20s, sporting a contemporary corduroy blazer, crewneck sweater, and jeans. A leather satchel is casually slung over his shoulder. They talk as they make their way to the table.)

HIGH PRIEST

I'm so glad you could come when I called! I truly believe you are our hope for averting tomorrow's disaster!

KELES

Whatever I can do to bring that siren to justice!

HIGH PRIEST

We'll go over the details later, after you've had a chance to meet Hero.

(The door at Stage Left opens, and MALE-HERO, hereafter, M-HERO, a series young man in his early 30s and dressed in a contemporary business suit, enters the chamber.)

M-HERO

High Priest, you wanted to see me?

HIGH PRIEST

Ah, here's the man in question now!

KELES

The *man*?!

M-HERO

Still questioning my manhood, Excellency?

(He notices KELES.)

What's this about? You know I have details to see to for tomorrow.

HIGH PRIEST

Believe me, Mr. President-Elect, your inauguration is foremost on my mind! This will take only a moment of your precious time.

(The HIGH PRIEST motions to M-HERO, who reluctantly takes the chair at Center Stage. The HIGH PRIEST remains standing and places the dossier before the Upstage chair at the table. KELES sits on the Downstage chair.)

HIGH PRIEST

Now, I must ask you to recite your story once more before our guest.

M-HERO

“Once more” was a hundred renditions ago!

HIGH PRIEST

We had to be sure.

M-HERO

Every doctor in Sestos stripped me bare a dozen times! You, yourself, were present for each unveiling!

HIGH PRIEST

(turns to KELES, chuckles nervously)

In my official capacity as High Priest!

(He glares at M-HERO. His courtesy is at an end.)

The Great Godde, Poseidon, performed a miracle upon you, my son. You must expect some stares.

M-HERO

(indicating KELES)

Whose stare have you invited this time?

KELES

(rises)

My name is —

HIGH PRIEST

Not important...for the moment.

(KELES sits.)

HIGH PRIEST

Let's just say this gentleman has a vested interest in the recent affairs of our city-state, and I'm convinced of his right to hear the tale of Hero and Leander directly from you.

M-HERO

What of my right to privacy?

HIGH PRIEST

Miracles are meat for public consumption! – especially for one about to be sworn in to high office. So, as you have previously stated, up until a year ago this very night, you were Hero, a young *wenn* of Sestos who lived in the tower by the Hellespont.

KELES

(to M-HERO) You are Hero?!

(The MEMORY OF FEMELE HERO, hereafter F-HERO, suddenly appears Upstage Center. She appears to be in her early 30s and wears a long ghostly pale Grecian tunic. She maintains intense eye contact with an uncomfortable M-HERO, as she walks slowly towards him. She circles around his chair, coming to a stop behind it, and boldly faces the interrogators. M-HERO is the only character who can see or hear her although he attempts to ignore her when in the presence of others, often unsuccessfully.)

F-HERO

(emphatically) I am Hero!

M-HERO

(to F-HERO) Not now!

KELES

(to M-HERO) You are *not* Hero?

F-HERO

(to-M-HERO) They can neither see nor hear me, remember?

KELES

(to HIGH PRIEST) I'm confused.

HIGH PRIEST

(*laughs*) No man would want to be a wenn, let alone admit to having once been one!

M-HERO

That's not what I meant!

F-HERO

Are you sure?

HIGH PRIEST

Why deny it, my boy? It only goes to show that you have become a member of the club!

F-HERO

And a traitor to your sex!

M-HERO

(to F-HERO) My sex is male now!

HIGH PRIEST

— Which has permitted you to take an active role in government! You would do well to remember that! (to KELES) From our inquiries,

(He taps the dossier on the table.)

which have been many –

M-HERO

— Too many!

HIGH PRIEST

We can only conclude that this young man before us is, indeed, the former wenn named Hero.

KELES

Amazing!

HIGH PRIEST

A miracle!

F-HERO

A mistake!

M-HERO

A waste of time!

(He leaps up from his chair, glaring at KELES.)

I don't know who you are, sir, but I have no desire to take another useless stroll down Memory Lane for a stranger's amusement!

KELES

(stands up resolutely)

I am Keles of Abydos!

M-HERO

Keles?!

F-HERO

Leander's cousin!

(She quickly goes over to the table.)

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) He wasn't supposed to know that yet!

M-HERO

You're truly Leander's cousin, Keles?

(KELES nods. F-HERO regards him intently.)

F-HERO

Look at his eyes. He has Leander's eyes!

M-HERO

I see the resemblance.

KELES

Growing up, everyone swore we looked more like brothers.

M-HERO

And were as close as brothers, so Leander said.

KELES

(pleased) Did he?! Did he really?!

HIGH PRIEST

Protocol, Gentlemen!

(KELES sits down. M-HERO goes back to his seat. F-HERO remains by the table, admiring KELES.)

HIGH PRIEST

(to M-HERO) Returning to the pertinent facts: The female Hero — that *she* whom you once were before you became the *he* you are now —

M-HERO

If we dispense with the sex and gender references, we'll get through this much faster.

HIGH PRIEST

Dispense with sex and none of us would be here!

(HIGH PRIEST Pauses awkwardly as he realizes what he has said. He clears his throat.)

KELES

(to M-HERO) How did you become a man?

HIGH PRIEST

We're getting to that part.

F-HERO

(sullenly) The parting of Hero and *her* body!

M-HERO

(to F-HERO) The addition of another body part.

KELES

(to M-HERO) I figured that much!

HIGH PRIEST

Gentlemen! Up until one year ago this very night, a female Hero lived alone in the tower overlooking the Hellespont. But she had a lover.

F-HERO

Leander!

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) Leander of Abydos, your cousin. *(to M-HERO)* Whom Hero met...?

M-HERO

That spring, during the Festival of Adonis.

F-HERO

Leander was an Adonis!

HIGH PRIEST

Our Hero claims it was love at first sight.

KELES

So Leander told me.

F-HERO

(pleased) Did he?! Did he really?!

HIGH PRIEST

But they had an odd arrangement. He would swim from his home on the far shore of the Hellespont each night to visit Hero. And she would place a lantern in the high window of her tower to guide him on his way.

KELES

I told him he should take a motorboat across. — or drive his car over the bridge!

F-HERO

You're much more practical than your cousin, aren't you?

M-HERO

(to KELES) I think his intention was to impress his lady love with his stamina.

F-HERO

Which he did! – Quite often!

HIGH PRIEST

Otherwise, the affair continued unspectacularly –

F-HERO

(to the HIGH PRIEST) You obviously weren't there!

HIGH PRIEST

How long was it?

F-HERO

(spreading her hands apart as if to measure)

Oh, I'd say about —

M-HERO

(jumps in) Six months! The relationship continued for six months prior to their deaths.

HIGH PRIEST

Leander's death, Hero; you survived!

F-HERO

Did I?

M-HERO

(to KELES) If you want a blow-by-blow description of the relationship,
(*He points to the dossier on the table.*)
the High Priest has meticulously documented the details of each encounter.

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) In my official capacity as High Priest!

KELES

(*smiles*) Of course!

HIGH PRIEST

(*clears his throat*)

On the night in question –

F-HERO

Are we really going through this again?!!

M-HERO

(to F-HERO) Listen or leave!

KELES

I'll listen, thank you!

M-HERO

(to KELES) Of course.

(F-HERO walks away from the table and behind M-HERO's chair in an effort to distance herself from the latest recitation of the tale.)

HIGH PRIEST

Leander did not arrive at his usual time?

M-HERO

A storm had been forecast for that night.

HIGH PRIEST

The sea was particularly rough?

M-HERO

The winds raged like the Furies, themselves.

HIGH PRIEST

They drove the very stars from the sky...

F-HERO

...and the flame from the lantern.

M-HERO

...and the flame from the lantern.

KELES

Leander should never have ventured forth on such a night!

F-HERO

I phoned him! Begged him not to attempt it!

M-HERO

He would not be dissuaded.

KELES

A true tragedy!

HIGH PRIEST

An avoidable mishap! Aeschylus would never stage such a travesty! Euripides, maybe.

(He Pauses to consider, then shrugs.)

That next morning, Leander's body washed up on the rocks. Meanwhile, Hero, you were...?

F-HERO

...at the high window!

M-HERO

.... standing watch in the tower.

KELES

What did you do when you saw Leander?

(Neither F-HERO nor M-HERO responds.)

HIGH PRIEST

(slowly and deliberately) What did you do, Hero?

F-HERO

Threw myself from the window!

M-HERO

Jumped from the tower.

HIGH PRIEST

And plunged headlong into the sea?!

F-HERO and M-HERO

Yes!

(Pause)

KELES

Yet you lived?!

M-HERO

(looking straight at F-HERO)

The sea refused to drown me.

KELES

What?!

HIGH PRIEST

While you were floundering beneath the waves, you heard something.

F-HERO and M-HERO

A voice.

KELES

A voice?!

F-HERO

Like a tidal wave ravishing a vessel!

M-HERO

Like a whisper whirling in a conch shell.

*(F-HERO looks at M-HERO questioningly,
as if surprised by his assessment.)*

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) The voice of Poseidon, Godde of the Sea! *(to M-HERO)* This Divine Voice said something to you. What was it?

M-HERO

(softly) "Because I love you!"

(KELES looks to the HIGH PRIEST.)

HIGH PRIEST

Louder! Repeat the Godde's words!

M-HERO

"Because I love you!"

HIGH PRIEST

Suddenly, you found yourself standing on the shore.

M-HERO

Yes.

HIGH PRIEST

And when you glanced down? — to see if any harm had come to you?

M-HERO

I was like this.

HIGH PRIEST

You were a man!

M-HERO

Yes.

(F-HERO quickly distances herself from M-HERO and moves Upstage Center.)

HIGH PRIEST

“Because I love you!” A Blessed Transformation!

F-HERO

Must I be erased to embrace the future?!

(F-HERO vanishes. M-HERO takes a deep breath.)

KELES

(to M-HERO) Everyone must have been astonished!

M-HERO

My mother wept to have lost a daughter; my father rejoiced to have gained a son; and the priests praised the “Blessed Transformation.” No one asked my opinion.

HIGH PRIEST

Why would they? Every wren secretly wishes to be a man!

M-HERO

So every *man* tells me.

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) Since Hero’s transformation and admittance to the Council, he has concerned himself with the great issues of our age — energy, security, finance. But, unfortunately, he also forwards a radical social agenda.

M-HERO

(to KELES) I call it "Justice."

KELES

Catchy!

HIGH PRIEST

And in March, he convinced the normally reasonable councilmen of Sestos to grant wennen the right to vote —

M-HERO

To *acknowledge* their right to vote.

HIGH PRIEST

A wenn's place —

M-HERO

— is where she chooses to make it!

HIGH PRIEST

Sometimes, Hero, I doubt whether you are really a man, at all!

M-HERO

Would the High Priest care to strip me bare and get another eyeful?

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) I warned the Council against accepting this changeling so fast into their ranks! And last month, due in large part to his popularity among his new *femele* constituents, he was elected President of Sestos. (to M-HERO) I fear you won't stop until you see a wenn run for president!

M-HERO

I won't stop until I see a wenn *sworn in* as President!

HIGH PRIEST

In your augural address tomorrow, Hero, you'd best thank Poseidon for the great gift of manhood that has been bestowed upon you, which has made your meteoric rise to power possible. Else, I suspect the Godde shall punish your obstinance! "Because I love you!" These were Poseidon's words, not mine. Remember that! *(to KELES)* I leave him to you, sir!

(HIGH PRIEST exits via the door at Downstage Right.)

END OF ACT ONE, SCENE 1

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

The same Small Chamber in the Council Hall of Sestos,
immediately following the High Priest's exit at the end of Scene 1

(KELES, stands by the door at Stage Right, his head swimming with the information he has just learned from the conversation between M-Hero and the High Priest. He comes over to M-HERO, who stands at Center Stage.)

KELES

Is he always so intense?

M-HERO

(nods) In his official capacity as High Priest. *(Pause)* Tell me, Keles. Why has he 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 boo— *(stops short, immediately choosing a more political correct word)*...body. The form may be lost, but the wits remain.

M-HERO

Your point?

KELES

The essence of that Hero still resides in you!

M-HERO

Walking on the other side of gex¹ alters one's perceptions. My name is the same, but I've changed in more than just appearance. I'm no longer that person I was a year ago, and it's no use pretending I am.

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 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 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 doesn't love the sailor she lures.

KELES

No. *(Pause)* You mentioned Leander wouldn't 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.

1. *gex: n. gender and sex considered together as a unified whole.*

M-HERO

It will always be a tragedy to us.

(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 he tell me of your transformation when he phoned?

M-HERO

The High Priest phoned you?

KELES

(backtracks 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 wennis' 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, gay men do hold elected office.

M-HERO

But their manhood is still called into question. I'm beyond *homosexual*; I'm *transsexual*.

KELES

But your transformation 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's never had to forfeit his form to fulfill his function!

*(The HIGH PRIEST appears at the door,
Downstage Right.)*

HIGH PRIEST

I see you two are getting to know each other. Splendid! Hero, I need to borrow Keles for a moment.

M-HERO

He's all yours!

KELES

(to M-HERO) I'll see what more I can find out.

(M-HERO glares at KELES.)

KELES

(uncomfortably) Right!

(KELES exits with HIGH PRIEST, Stage Right. M-HERO plops down wearily in a chair. F-HERO reappears Upstage Center and runs towards the door at Downstage Right, calling after the HIGH PRIEST.)

F-HERO

Keles isn't your choirboy, Cleric!

M-HERO

Neither is he Leander.

F-HERO

Leander's cousin will do.

M-HERO

And what can a memory hope to *do* with him?

F-HERO

Why do you nix my fantasy?

M-HERO

Why do you deny my reality?

F-HERO

Because *I* am Hero! – The memory of your true self. What Hero *really* looks like. What Hero *really* sounds like. What Hero *really is!* How did Keles put it?...Hero's *essence!*

M-HERO

He said that essence resides in me now.

F-HERO

He's never met *me*! *(Pause)* It's a year tonight. A year since Leander's death and mine!

M-HERO

(tenderly) I know.

F-HERO

I don't want to spend it alone.

M-HERO

What can I do?

F-HERO

Bring Keles to my tower.

M-HERO

Why torture yourself with false hope?

F-HERO

This goes beyond attraction!

(Pause)

M-HERO

I haven't been back there since it happened.

F-HERO

Then the timing is right!

M-HERO

The timing couldn't be worse! Are you not paying attention to what is happening here? The High Priest is scheming to cancel the inauguration. Everything we've worked so hard for all our life is on the brink of coming true, yet it could be undone with one wrong move!

F-HERO

I haven't worked hard all my life just to see another *man* sworn in as President!

M-HERO

Another man?!

F-HERO

That's what *you* claim Hero is now? — A man?

M-HERO

Because it's the truth! We must accept the situation and move forward.

F-HERO

The past is Memory's prison!

M-HERO

Then free *me!*

F-HERO

Not until you take Keles to my library! Show him my writings. — notebooks full of them! A decade of my proposals and —

(She stops herself. Then softly to herself.)

a prayer — once longed for, now lamented — whispered into a conch shell.

M-HERO

I've already brought some of those proposals before the Council, and they've been enacted!

F-HERO

But *you* have been given credit for them, not *I*! I want Keles to see the truth for himself tonight! I want him to realize there's another interpretation — a different explanation — for Hero's "Blessed Transformation" than the one forwarded by that pompous prelate! I want him to discover that *before* you take the oath of office tomorrow. *Before* you have the chance to take any more away from me than you already have!

M-HERO

When did you become a feminazi?

F-HERO

About the time you became a masculini! (*Pause*) You *will* do this for me.

M-HERO

Why will I? – if I am such a *masculini*?

F-HERO

Because *you* were once *me*, and *I* am now *you*!

(*KELES and HIGH PRIEST reenter from the door at Downstage Right.*)

HIGH PRIEST

(*to KELES*) I'm sure Hero will consider it no intrusion. His tower has sat vacant for a year, after all!

M-HERO

What's this?

KELES

The High Priest has invited me to attend your swearing-in ceremony tomorrow as his special guest. But he wasn't able to book me a room at any local hotel.

HIGH PRIEST

Your inauguration with its miracle backstory has drawn quite a crowd from all over Thrace.

M-HERO

A fact that we had anticipated for some time.

HIGH PRIEST

I told Keles you wouldn't mind putting him up at your tower.

F-HERO

(laughs) I'd be delighted to!

(She smiles smugly at M-HERO and vanishes.)

M-HERO

How generous the *High Priest* is with *my* hospitality! I was planning to get a good night's rest at home tonight.

HIGH PRIEST

Rest at the tower! Reflect! Reminisce! It's a good thing to indulge our memory before moving forward into the future. And where is Hero's past better housed than at the tower?! Allow yourself one final chance to remember that grounded, idyllic life you once led and are about to give up forever to dive still deeper into the turbulent depths of politics and partisan intrigue. Is it worth it, Hero? Carefully reassess what you really want before taking yet another unretractable leap.

M-HERO

Is the High Priest referring to my leap into the presidency? – or is there another unretractable leap he envisions me taking?

(HIGH PRIEST pulls M-HERO aside, out of KELES's earshot.)

HIGH PRIEST

(speaking in a hushed but firm voice)

I'd welcome your leap to honor the power and privilege of the office you have been elected to. – To come to respect the importance of the rock-solid traditions retained by generations of *men* who have held that office before you. There's a beautiful order to continuity, Hero.

M-HERO

There's a big difference between true order and suppressed chaos, High Priest.

HIGH PRIEST

Making such a distinction can bring a society to its knees!

M-HERO

Or lift many of its members up off of theirs!

(He breaks free of the HIGH PRIEST's grasp.)

I have business to attend to for tomorrow.

(The HIGH PRIEST notices KELES's questioning expression. He smiles and resumes a jovial demeanor.)

HIGH PRIEST

My goodness, the day escapes us all! I will meet you both before the tower at nine sharp tomorrow morning and escort you to the inauguration.

KELES

That's very kind of you, Excellency.

(HIGH PRIEST exits via the door at Downstage Right.)

KELES

(to M-HERO) That old bugger is all but throwing us into bed together and our reputations be damned!

M-HERO

(calmly) It appears that way.

KELES

Why does he so resent your becoming a man?

M-HERO

A New Man is not an Old Boy.

KELES

I wouldn't put it past him to send drones around the tower tonight equipped with telephoto camera lenses!

M-HERO

It wouldn't matter if he did. Nothing will happen between us, and no sensible person will believe his saying otherwise.

KELES

And just how do you plan to stop that rumor from getting started!

M-HERO

We won't be alone.

(He takes out his cellphone and hits speed dial.)

KELES

Who else will be there?

M-HERO

(talking on his cellphone)

Hi Hon!...No, not yet. I was called away. ...Who do you think?...Yeah, he's making things as difficult as possible. I'm heading back to the office now. Listen, Love, I need you to meet me at the tower later on...Yes, the tower! We'll be staying there until morning...Of course, I know what night this is!... I have no choice!...Mysia, please! I have to do this, and I won't get through it without you... *(sigh of relief)* Thank you! Oh, and when you pack your bag, could you remember to bring my new suit?...I'll explain more when I arrive...See you there about seven?...I love you, too.

(He pockets his cellphone.)

All taken care of!

KELES

Mysia, huh? Your girlfriend?

M-HERO

(smiles) My spouse!

KELES

Oh.

(The reality of that suddenly hits him.)

Oooh!

(Lights fade out.)

END of ACT ONE, SCENE 2

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

The Bedchamber in Hero's Tower, late that night

(Dimmed lighting suggesting nighttime comes up in the bedchamber of Hero's tower. A large bed commands the middle of the room, its headboard flush against the Center of the Upstage wall. To the left of the headboard stands a wooden coat tree. On it hangs a unisex suit and a contemporary dress. In the middle of the Stage Left wall is a door to the staircase. Downstage Left, a freestanding full-length mirror is placed a few feet from the wall. It is positioned at an angle so that no reflection is visible to the audience. A small washstand with a basin atop it are placed next to the mirror. Downstage Right, a small dressing table with dressing bench are located a few feet from the wall. This table, also, is positioned at an angle so no reflection from its mirror can be seen by the audience. A comb and brush rest on this table. In the middle of the Stage Right wall is a large floor-to-ceiling window opening. Its wide and deep stone ledge can easily hold two people standing on it together. This is the "high window" of the tower from which a female Hero jumped a year ago.

M-HERO, with a pitcher in his hand and a towel flung over his shoulder, enters from the door at Stage Left and makes his way to the washstand. He pours water into the basin and sets the pitcher down. Draping the towel over the mirror's left stanchion, he glances uneasily at his reflection in the mirror. F-HERO suddenly appears in the Upper Stage Right corner of the chamber, startling M-HERO, who catches her reflection in the mirror.)

F-HERO

It's so good to be back at the tower! Welcome home!

M-HERO

My home is in town.

(He turns from the mirror and faces F-HERO)

F-HERO

(not deterred) Hero's bedchamber! Nothing has changed!

(She excitedly goes to the dressing table.)

Look, here's the comb Hero used each night to fix her hair before Leander arrived,...and, each morning, as well — *(laughs)* — better still! — to untangle it after he left!

(She puts her hair up.)

Remember?

(M-HERO regards her stoically. F-HERO walks over to the high window.)

F-HERO

And here is the window where Hero watched for her love!

(She mounts its ledge and looks out over the Hellespont)

On this very stone she'd stand, pale yet powerful – like the full moon on a clear night, drawing the very sea to her doorstep!

(Turning, she looks towards the chamber door and hops down from the ledge.)

And Leander, faithful as the tide, would come to her, wet and cold with shiver.

(She climbs up and knees on the bed.)

and the moon would stretch out her rays and lay them lightly upon his surface.

(She motions as if reaching out for Leander and embracing him once more in a rapture of remembrance.)

Then the tide would rise up and touch the moon... on those nights when Hero's love would come to love her!

M-HERO

(coldly) The tide that comes in with dusk goes out with dawn, and there's a new moon now.

(M-HERO pulls off his shirt and splashes water on his face. F-HERO watches him. Pause.)

F-HERO

Keles is in the library, reading.

M-HERO

Mysia is in the kitchen, snacking.

F-HERO

She's been doing a lot of that lately; she's getting fat.

M-HERO

Don't be cruel.

F-HERO

You were cruel to bring her here! — Tonight of all nights!

M-HERO

It's for my protection.

F-HERO

So you won't lose control and throw yourself at Keles?

M-HERO

(laughs) Yes, that's it!

F-HERO

One can hope for a miracle.

M-HERO

A miracle's already happened. Hero is a man now. — and a married one, at that!

(M-HERO walks before the full-length mirror, dries his face, and drapes the towel back over the stanchion.)

F-HERO

A man, a man, a man!

(She comes up behind M-HERO, regarding him in the mirror over his shoulder.)

What has happened to Hero's breasts, soft and supple as rose petals?

(She walks between M-HERO and the mirror and faces him.)

How full they were...Remember?

(She lets drop the bodice of her gown, revealing her breasts to him. M-HERO regards them with tenderness in his eyes. There are clearly no inhibitions between the past and present versions of Hero.)

M-HERO

I remember.

(F-HERO pulls up her bodice and regards M-HERO's chest.)

F-HERO

(mockingly) Hero's beautiful breasts have become two hard, flat stones. They still have nipples! Why, Hero? Are you planning to suckle your babes after someone *else* bears them? Is there anything in this world so *useless* as a man's nipples?!

(She walks behind M-HERO again.)

M-HERO

You once thought a man's body beautiful when you loved Leander.

F-HERO

When *you* loved Leander, Hero!

(She takes hold of M-HERO by the biceps.)

F-HERO

This is the same flesh that, not so long ago, in another form, made love to a man!
And its sensations! How it tingled when Leander pressed close!

(F-HERO cups her hand and presses it against M-HERO's crouch. M-HERO breaks away.)

M-HERO

Why do you remind me?!

(He flops down on the bed.)

How I wish I could forget you!

F-HERO

(walks over to M-HERO triumphantly)

Hero shall never forget *herself*!

(She strokes his cheek.)

Oh dear! I need a shave!

M-HERO

Mysia will be here in a minute.

(F-HERO slaps M-HERO's face, storms over to the high window, and gazes out over the sea. Pause.)

F-HERO

(furiously) I suppose you're planning to make love to her here tonight – in *my* bed!

M-HERO

(calmly) No. In *mine*!

(M-HERO sprawls over the bed. MYSIA's voice is heard outside the bedchamber.)

MYSIA

Hero? Are you still up?

M-HERO

(calling to her from bed)

I'm up for anything you have in mind, my love!

(M-HERO glances at F-HERO with a smug expression on his face. F-HERO, disgusted, walks up to the Upper Stage Right corner and vanishes. MYSIA enters the bedchamber from the door at Stage Left. She is an attractive and well-dressed woman in her late 20s.)

MYSIA

(winded) I must have climbed a hundred steps!

M-HERO

(apologetically) It's only for tonight.

(MYSIA catches her breath and looks around uneasily.)

MYSIA

So this is Hero's fabled bedchamber.

M-HERO

Was. There's nothing here for me now.

MYSIA

Except the memory of what has been. Memory can be a powerful thing.

M-HERO

Not so powerful as our present together! – nor our dreams for the future!

(MYSIA walks over to the high window without mounting its ledge. She looks out over the Hellespont and takes a deep breath.)

MYSIA

I do love the salt sea air and the rumble of the waves.

M-HERO

How beautiful you look in the moonlight!

(MYSIA walks over to the dressing table.)

MYSIA

I was worried when you said you were coming here tonight.

M-HERO

The High Priest's idea. He still can't accept me as a man, let alone as President!

MYSIA

Must be your unique blend of masculine outlook and feminine insight!

M-HERO

I've asked you not to say that!

MYSIA

Because you still haven't accepted it, yourself!

(She walks over to M-HERO and takes by the hands.)

MYSIA

You're *not* a typical man, Hero! – You never will be! I cherish that uniqueness. I cherish *you*! I'll take a *New Man* over an *Old Boy* any day of the week!

M-HERO

Truly?

MYSIA

Let the Bravado Billies tinker with their titan trucks! You've got the girl!
(*She kisses M-HERO.*)

M-HERO

It's just that the High Priest is trying to use the transformation as a weapon against wennen. – as evidence that Poseidon holds men superior!

MYSIA

What did you expect?! Bolstering up the fragile male ego is what men's religion is all about, and reality be damned!

M-HERO

(*smiles*) What an abject heretic you are!

MYSIA

Any self-respecting wenn must be! – or have you forgotten? Why let that stodgy old spin doctor bother you now?

M-HERO

These proposals I've introduced before the Council recently...They were ideas I had over the course of a decade. – That I wrote down in notebooks and placed on shelves in my library where they yellowed with age because I wasn't allowed admittance to the Council. They were a wenn's ideas, and now a man is getting credit for them!

MYSIA

They were *Hero's* ideas, and *Hero* is getting credit for them!

M-HERO

(angrily) Was there no other way for Poseidon to accomplish that than by robbing me of my wennhood?!

MYSIA

On whom have you declared war, Hero?! – on Godde or on Man? I am neither!

(She approaches M-HERO and holds him.)

Your transformation has been the catalyst for the Council's acknowledging the right to vote of every wenn born in Sestos. Finally, my lifelong citizenship in this city-state has been recognized! That's why I agreed to be your campaign manager last spring! And that's why, when I got the chance to cast my very first vote — and for president, no less! — I proudly cast it for Hero!

M-HERO

And I thought it was because you were madly in love with me!

MYSIA

My love is given with good cause! And soon, when the bill currently before the Council passes and a wenn's right to *hold* any elected office is acknowledged — again thanks to Hero! — Who knows? Maybe someday we shall see a daughter of ours sworn in as President of Sestos!

M-HERO

May it please the goddes!

MYSIA

I wish you could accept yourself as you are now. – as I accept you!

M-HERO

I just want to fit in somewhere.

MYSIA

(coyly) Oh, I know where you are a perfect fit, my love! And the proof is right here.

(She takes M-HERO's hands and places them on her abdomen.)

M-HERO

What's this? You mean? —

MYSIA

(nods) You're going to be a father!

M-HERO

When?!

MYSIA

In six months' time.

M-HERO

Mysia!

(He picks her up and spins around. MYSIA laughs. M-HERO puts her down gently.)

This is fantastic news! I wasn't really sure I could...

MYSIA

(placing her finger over M-HERO's lips)

(smiles) You did!

(She walks over to the high window again and gazes out over the Hellespont. Pause.)

Hero, do you love me as much as you once did Leander?

M-HERO

Leander was never pregnant with my child.

MYSIA

Seriously!

M-HERO

(He walks over to MYSIA, turns her away from the window, and takes her in his arms)

Never doubt it.

(M-HERO kisses MYSIA passionately. Pause. MYSIA smiles. She walks over to the dressing table and picks up Hero's brush, as if debating whether or not to use it. Deciding against it, she puts it down and turns abruptly to M-HERO.)

MYSIA

I want you to do something for me then. – Grow a beard and mustache!

M-HERO

Am I not man enough for you clean-shaven?

MYSIA

Ah! Is that masculine insecurity I detect? Hero, your transformation is complete!
(Pause) Will you do it?

(M-HERO hesitates a moment, and glances back out the high window. He then turns to MYSIA and steps towards her.)

M-HERO

(nods) For you, Mysia, anything!

MYSIA

Good! Now let me do something for you!

(MYSIA takes M-HERO by the hand and walks him over to the bed.)

M-HERO

You've already made me the happiest man in the world!

MYSIA

Prepare to get happier!

(MYSIA pushes M-HERO down on the bed.)

M-HERO

Oh, Mysia! I have no doubts when I'm with you! It's so hard to hold back!

MYSIA

Then don't!

(MYSIA climbs onto the bed, reaching her arms out to M-HERO. F-HERO suddenly appears in the Upper Stage Right corner. This time, she is unseen and unheard by M-HERO as well as MYSIA. F-HERO watches the lovers wistfully.)

F-HERO

And the moon would stretch out her rays and lay them lightly upon his surface –

(She goes to the high window, mounts the ledge, looks out over the Hellespont, and sigh.)

– those nights when Hero's love would come to love her.

(Lights fade out slowly.)

END OF ACT ONE, SCENE 3

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

The Library of Hero's Tower, just before dawn
on the day of M-Hero's scheduled inauguration

(Lights come up in the library of Hero's tower. Shelves of books line the Upstage wall. In the middle of the Stage Left wall is a door to the staircase. Opposite, in the middle of the Stage Right wall, is a window opening, half the length and width to the one in Hero's bedchamber. The dim glow of impending dawn shines through it. At Center Stage is a long rectangular wooden table with a chair placed behind it. A large pile of already read notebooks is pushed towards one side of the table, while only one unread notebook remains on the other side.)

KELES sits at the table, between the notebooks, His satchel is slung over the back of the chair. Before him is an opened notebook, which he pours over intently. F-HERO anxiously paces back and forth Downstage. Each time she turns, she pauses to look at KELES, trying to read his expression, which remains inscrutable. She sighs and resumes her pacing. Finally, she stops short and addresses the earnest young man, who can neither see nor hear her.)

F-HERO

How many writers dream of being an invisible observer when someone is reading their work! – To see their candid expressions! To hear their honest comments uncensored by the kindness or diplomacy or fear that keeps so many from saying what they truly think! What good is my being invisible to you, Keles, if you sit there stone-faced and silent?

(KELES closes the notebook before him, places it on the "read" pile, and looks to the window.)

KELES

It's nearly dawn.

(He stands up and stretches, then walks to the window and gazes out over the Hellespont.)

A year ago this morning, Leander's body washed up on that beach. A year ago, a female Hero threw herself into the sea and became a man.

(Pause. He looks back at the notebooks.)

So here we are now!

F-HERO

So here we are!

KELES

Half of Sestos anticipating Hero's swearing in today; the other half swearing at the very thought of it!

(He walks purposefully back to the table and regards the pile of notebooks.)

I swear by Poseidon, Hero, your brilliance sweeps across these pages! Whether stating a proposal or raging against an injustice, your fluid expression. – Your words roll and roar like the waves!

F-HERO

Do you think so?!

KELES

When you argue a point, who can refute it? One might as well draw a sword against the sea!

F-HERO

Some have tried!

KELES

There must be forty notebooks here! I see the same handwriting, hear the same voice — maturing through the years, as any voice would.

F-HERO

I was fresh out of college when I started!

KELES

Thank goodness you numbered and dated each entry. In these older books, the ink is faded and the pages have yellowed. No reasonable councilman will accept that all these proposals could have been written in just one year. — and certainly not within the last year! This is clearly the work of a decade. — written when Hero was a wrenn.

F-HERO

At last, you see me, Keles! As much as any other person can see me now!

KELES

Yet I find myself on the wrong side of history!

F-HERO

How so?!

KELES

(speaks as if to the absent HIGH PRIEST)

You must be satisfied with yourself about now, High Priest! Arranging for me to infiltrate Hero's tower. —

F-HERO

Infiltrate?!

KELES

— To place Hero and me in a compromising position.

F-HERO

You want to compromise yourself with *me*, not with that *clone* upstairs!

KELES

I'm relieved Mysia's presence thwarted that scheme.

F-HERO

Mysia's presence thwarts so many!

KELES

So I've spent the entire night in this library, pouring through Hero's notebooks. I've read all these proposals, High Priest, that you wanted to believe a male Hero had dreamed up practically overnight. You refused to accept it when he told you otherwise. Instead, you clung to that crumbling monolith of the "illogical female mind" — too unstable to devise coherent plans, too unsteady to honor firm commitments, too flighty to vote responsibly. — And when it comes to holding any position of true power...well, Goddess forbid! — solid leadership is particularly beyond their comprehension!

F-HERO

(flatly) How some men can walk erect is beyond *my* comprehension!

KELES

You thought if only I could find fresh ink scribbled across the pages of a few new notebooks, that would cement your case. Hero would be exposed as a liar — a blasphemer! The Council would retract their acknowledgement of *wennen's* right to vote; the results of the recent election would be declared invalid; and Hero would be prohibited from taking office to implement his "radical agenda"!

F-HERO

Her just agenda!

KELES

And the kicker is I allowed myself to become your stooge. — All because I blamed Hero for Leander's death. I had mentioned that to you on the day you phoned me. You knew it wasn't so, yet you didn't set me straight. My false assumption made me your useful pawn.

F-HERO

Oh, Keles!

KELES

Well, I've face the truth since coming here. Honesty doesn't seek a scapegoat, and neither does honor.

F-HERO

You've had your own Hellespont to swim.

KELES

And you kept the "Blessed Transformation" from me, too, High Priest, so it would hit me harder to see how Hero had benefitted from Leander's death. – so I would see Hero not only as my enemy, but the enemy of your city-state. – the enemy of the Godde Poseidon, whose gift of manhood you insisted he ridiculed by misusing it to promote the advancement of wennen!

(He imitates the HIGH PRIEST.)

"Poseidon wills Hero's punishment!" you told me. "You will be blessed for doing the Godde's bidding!" And, like a fool, I bought the snake oil you were peddling! I marched off, a pious soldier to the latest crusade, with curses on my lips and hatred in my heart! *(Pause)* How can that be any godde's bidding?

F-HERO

Flattery and insult are both used to manacle the faithful. I suspect flattery is the harder chain to break through.

KELES

(looking over the pile of notebooks)

Ah, Hero! You dedicated your life to the pursuit of justice. And I would have the Council do justice by you!

(Pause. He shakes his head.)

Only, why else would the Sea Godde have transformed you into a man? – and with the words "Because I love you"?! I'm not Oedipus to solve the riddle of the Sphinx!

F-HERO

And I'm no Sphinx! There's still one notebook left, Keles. Right there on the table. –

(She points to the single notebook.)

– under your nose! It's the oldest one. – My very first! Open it and read the dedication. – The prayer a young wren penned to the Sea Godde, Poseidon, at the beginning of her writing odyssey. – At a time when her ideas were just setting sail! – When her social conscience was charting its course! – When she still held hope that justice could navigate through vast reefs of misogyny if only the Godde smiled upon her voyage!

KELES

One notebook left.

(He regards the light at the window becoming brighter.)

The sun is rising, and I haven't slept a wink! What hope is there that the answer will be in this volume when it wasn't in the others?

F-HERO

If only I had a body, I could throw open that notebook, myself, and point to the dedication! If only you could see and hear me! By Poseidon, Fluid Godde whom I worshipped above all others, why have you allowed me to evaporate into nothingness!

KELES

I'm sorry, Hero. There's nothing more can I do for you.

(KELES lays his head down on the table.)

F-HERO

(shouts) Get your head up and open it!

(Suddenly, a loud and unearthly whisper, rippling "Open it!" reverberates through the library. F-HERO and KELES both look around the room in amazement.)

KELES

By the goddess, whose voice was that!?

(KELES stares at the last notebook. F-HERO comes over to him and places her hand on his shoulder.)

F-HERO

(gently) Open it, Keles.

KELES

(Still unable to see or hear F-HERO, but sensing a presence. He pulls the last notebook towards him cautiously and opens it.)

The most faded ink of all. And these dates...older than any of the others!

F-HERO

Go to the first page.

KELES

(fumbles through to the first page)

Here's a dedication.

F-HERO

Read it!

(F-HERO and KELES trade off in voicing the prayer. – KELES reading from the page; F-HERO reciting from memory.)

KELES

"Great Poseidon, Goddess of the Sea,

F-HERO

“I’ve come here to live in this tower on the edge of your watery realm —

KELES

“so that my fluctuating thoughts –

F-HERO

“— wave after wave of new and hopeful ideas! —

KELES

“— may find their place and purpose like your turning tides that inspire them.

F-HERO

“— Ideas, for which, here in my solitude, I now find the words to commit to paper.

KELES

“I long for others to hear the tides of possibilities that will flow from my hand across the pages these notebooks.

F-HERO

“Poseidon, do not suffer my written self to be lost to oblivion as has been the dismal fate of so many wennen before me whose needed voices were neither heard nor heeded.

KELES

“Let my voice be heard, Great Godde; let my thoughts be known!

F-HERO

“I sang this prayer into a conch shell this morning while standing before the high window of my bedchamber.

KELES

“I hurled it with all my might into the sea that it may find its way directly to you in your sunken abode beneath the Hellespont.

F-HERO

“Grant me the means to appear before the Council of Sestos, to be seen in the Council Hall by those men who turn a blind eye to me at present, refusing to be informed by one whose form does not conform to their requirements!

KELES

“Grant me the ability to be heard by those councilmen whose ears refuse to listen to one who speaks in the register of my voice!

F-HERO

“Great Poseidon, find a way that I might share the gift of my mind with these councilors —

KELES

(rising from his chair, speaking slowly and deliberately)

“without your taking from them the gift of free will that you goddess bestow upon us all.

F-HERO

“Do this for me, Dear Poseidon, Fluid Goddess of the Sea, Goddess of the Turning Tide, I pray You –

KELES

“If you love me...

F-HERO

“*Because* you love me!”

(Pause)

KELES

“Because I love you.” These were Poseidon words in turning Hero into a man. — Not because males are superior to females, High Priest, but because these council *men* allow only males to speak before them, to be members of the Council! — But that requirement was set into law by the will of men, themselves, enforced by their muscles. -- not by the will and might of any godde!

F-HERO

Now you understand, Keles!

KELES

(excitedly places the notebook in his satchel)

I'll present this notebook before the Council! These men will hear the real reason for Hero's "Blessed Transformation." It won't put an end to misogyny, but it should silence the High Priest's objections to Hero's inauguration.

F-HERO

And clear the way for my Agenda of Justice, now with the known sanction of the Godde!

KELES

(looks over the notebooks on the table)

(reflectively) Thoughts recorded on the yellowing pages of notebooks...a few smiling photos sent to Leander's cellphone...some stories my head-over-heels cousin told me about a lady of Sestos whose mind shone as brightly as her smile. These are all that is left of a female Hero. — These, and the legacy of how that lady's ideas came to be known and adopted by a city-state, and how they changed it for the better!

F-HERO

I am not ungrateful, Poseidon. Still, I have given up much to gain much.

KELES

Oh Hero, I wish it could have been my destiny to love you!

F-HERO

If only I could touch you now, Keles, with hands of flesh and blood!

KELES

To see you as you were!

F-HERO

To be as I was a year ago! You could have comforted me through this long night. You who fell in love with the mere report of me! — who have been enraptured here by my words! I could have easily loved you, Keles, and have drawn you close to my aching breast that has not felt a lover's touch in so long. Who had no comforting embrace just a year ago this very morning when they demanded I rejoice when all that was natural called for weeping. You are the only man who has mourned the loss of my female self!

KELES

I've come to know your mind through your writings, Hero. But it's not enough!

F-HERO

It's all we have!

KELES

I want to hold you! — Stroke your hair. — Caress your skin. — Kiss your lips!

F-HERO

Where is Hero's body now? In *my* bedchamber, making love to *Mysia*!

KELES

(walks over to the window and looks out over the Hellespont)

I'll go back to Abydos after the inauguration. There's no use of my staying here. I can't love a memory!

F-HERO

It's useless, useless, useless! Existing, but not living; fading, but not dead! A memory, and that is all! I have no further role to play in this world. I am no longer Hero!

(Lights fade out.)

END OF ACT TWO, SCENE 1

ACT TWO, SCENE 2

The Bedchamber of Hero's Tower, just after dawn
on the day of M-HERO's scheduled inauguration

(Lights come up on the bedchamber in HERO's tower. Sunshine streams in from the high window in the middle of the Stage Right wall. The sounds of seagulls are heard outside.)

MYSIA and M-HERO are in bed. MYSIA, awakened by the gulls, sits up and looks beyond M-HERO to the window and the bright sunshine. She smiles, throws off the covers, and nudges a still half-sleeping M-HERO.)

MYSIA

(cheerily) Wake up, Hero! Time to shine!

M-HERO

Huh?

MYSIA

It's morning.

(MYSIA gives M-HERO a peck on the cheek and gets out of bed.)

M-HERO

It's time for mourning whenever you leave our bed!

MYSIA

What a beautiful day for your inauguration!

(MYSIA takes her dress from the coat tree and slips into it.)

M-HERO

(sitting up) Tell me this is really happening, Mysia. – That it's not all a dream.

MYSIA

I'd hate to think that last night was only a fantasy and my dear Hero will disappear with the morning light.

M-HERO

Hero has disappeared before.

MYSIA

Not on my watch! Now get up for me!

M-HERO

(smiles) Again? You're never satisfied!

MYSIA

The High Priest will be here at nine o'clock!

M-HERO

No one should have to face off with the High Priest before high noon.

MYSIA

Let that be your first executive order, Mr. President!

M-HERO

If only I could executive order a Separation of Church and State as wide as the Hellespont – with the High Priest on the other side -- permanently!

MYSIA

What did the people of Abydos ever do to deserve him?

M-HERO

What did we ever do?!

MYSIA

(laughs) I brought fresh eggs and cheese with me last night. I'll make us some omelets.

M-HERO

Just think. – Tomorrow morning you'll wake up as First Lady of Sestos. You'll have an entire staff to wait on you hand and foot!

MYSIA

(smiles) Mm. What will I do with all that extra free time?

M-HERO

I could make a suggestion!

MYSIA

You'll be busy running the city-state! But until my staff arrives...

(She walks to the door Stage Left.)

I wonder if Keles is awake? I'll see if he'd like some breakfast.

M-HERO

I love you, Mysia!

MYSIA

Get up!

*(MYSIA exits via the door at Stage Left.
F-HERO appears in the Upper Stage Right
corner. She addresses M-HERO with disdain.)*

F-HERO

Lesbian!

(M-HERO rolls to the other side of the bed.)

F-HERO

Tell me, Hero, which do you prefer: being a wenn or making love to one?

M-HERO

Don't start!

F-HERO

You still need a shave.

M-HERO

I've decided to grow a beard.

(He walks over to the basin on the washstand and splashes water on his face.)

F-HERO

A beard will mask your face, not your past. *(Pause)* Do you enjoy being a man?

(M-HERO seems uneasy with the question.)

F-HERO

Answer me!

M-HERO

Last night, I made love to Mysia. Each muscle in my body moved as a man's should when he pleasures a wenn. Yes, I enjoy it!

F-HERO

Traitor!

M-HERO

Hero is a man now! There's no cure for it!

F-HERO

If there were, you'd dump it into the sea! I watched you after the transformation. "How deep my voice is now!" you'd say. "Never could I lift that much weight before!" You'd race to the mirror each morning just to see how much stubble had accumulated on your face overnight!

M-HERO

Manhood was new to me then! Wouldn't a man become a wenn have a similar experience? Wouldn't he try out the range of that clear soprano voice? — or marvel to think on having a womb that harbors the greatest power in Nature!

F-HERO

Men are not taught to value wennhood or anything a wenn does.

M-HERO

Then the more fool, men! — And the more fool, you, if you start thinking like one.

F-HERO

You should talk!

M-HERO

Don't mistake me! I've merely learned to appreciate my manhood. Would you have me pass the rest of my life mourning over my lost femininity?

F-HERO

It seems you haven't mourned at all!

M-HERO

Hero, you don't know yourself. *(sighs)* I've become Ground Zero in the most absurd of human battles. — A heretic if I promote women's civil rights, a traitor if I perform men's sexual role. I can only hope that between my heresy and my treason I please the goddess well!

(MYSIA enters from the door at Stage Left.)

MYSIA

Hero? Were you talking to yourself again?

M-HERO

Just going over my inaugural address.

MYSIA

(doesn't really believe him)

Ah! Keles says it's urgent that he speak with you.

M-HERO

What's he about now?

MYSIA

You don't trust him.

M-HERO

No.

MYSIA

He's Leander's cousin!

M-HERO

He's not Leander.

MYSIA

Well, he wants you to meet him in the library before the High Priest arrives.
(Pause) Are you sure you're alright?

M-HERO

Just lost in thought.

MYSIA

You haven't shaved yet.

M-HERO

I promised you a beard and a mustache. Did you doubt me?

MYSIA

Had I any doubts, they were dispelled last night.

(She strokes his stubbly cheek.)

But I meant *after* your inauguration. Why look scruffy today of all days?!

M-HERO

It will vex the High Priest!

MYSIA

He's a dangerous nemesis.

M-HERO

Last night, you told me to forget him.

MYSIA

(nods) The nonsense he speaks! This isn't a game, Hero.

M-HERO

Life is a game, Mysia. And there's no winning at it without taking some risks.
Mine have paid off so far, haven't they?

MYSIA

(sighs and shakes her head)

You'll look handsome with a beard. Get a move on!

(MYSIA exits by the door at Stage Left.)

F-HERO

There's one you please better as a man!

(M-HERO takes his suit from the coat tree and begins to dress. F-HERO watches agitatedly.)

F-HERO

So you don't find Keles attractive.

M-HERO

He's not my type.

F-HERO

He resembles Leander...You loved *him* once.

M-HERO

That was a lifetime ago.

F-HERO

Yes, a life time ago. *(Pause)* You have what you want then?

M-HERO

I have what hard work and destiny have given me.

F-HERO

My hard work! – a decade of it!

M-HERO

I've never denied that! — And it's been no picnic for me this past year trying to get the High Priest and Council to accept that fact! The important thing is that the bills are now being passed into law.

F-HERO

You are truly destiny's darling! Perhaps, you will look handsome with a beard.

M-HERO

(lighter) Better than you'll look with a frown of disapproval each time you see it!

F-HERO

You'll see neither my smile nor my frown.

M-HERO

No? Planning on becoming a Stoic?

F-HERO

I'm going away...forever.

M-HERO

What?! — That's not possible! You're my memory!

F-HERO

— who fades a little more each day! You're right not to waste your life mourning over me.

M-HERO

Neither can I forget you!

F-HERO

You are Hero now.

M-HERO

The present one only!

F-HERO

There is only the present! It's a sad mistake for a person to try to live in the past. — and ludicrous in our circumstances!

M-HERO

As ludicrous as it is for a person to deny his past!

F-HERO

Her past. Hero's past was feminine. I knew pains that the present Hero has forgotten. You enjoy privileges the past Hero never knew.

M-HERO

The stage is now being set for a future in which both sexes will share the limelight equally!

F-HERO

How do you expect me to rejoice in that future when my body no longer belongs to me?! You think you are blameless of any crime against the female sex? It is *you* who have reduced me to this ineffectual memory who can still be moved by beauty, who can still feel desire, but can neither touch nor be touched. The only thing Society could not take from me, *you* have taken from me! You have stolen Hero's very flesh and blood, and still you deny that you are guilty of any crime?! You are the *ultimate* usurper!

M-HERO

I am the fulfillment of your fondest wish to be heard!

F-HERO

A *femele* Hero wished to be heard! Will *I* be giving the inaugural address today?!
(Pause) I can bear to look on you no longer!

M-HERO

To this day, when someone calls the name “Hero,” it’s *your* face I see first in my mind. — *Your* body I still look for in the mirror!

F-HERO

(moved) Don’t.

M-HERO

Do you doubt it is *you* I often wish to find there!

F-HERO

Wants are weak against destiny!

(M-HERO retreats to the high window and looks out over it. Pause. Suddenly, he is struck by an idea.)

M-HERO

Perhaps our wants *are* our destiny.

F-HERO

What are you saying?

M-HERO

We have become sibling selves, you and I. Don’t deny it!

(F-HERO turns from him and regards herself in the dressing table mirror. M-Hero hops down off the window ledge and walks up behind F-HERO, taking her by the shoulders and also peering into the mirror.)

M-HERO

Without the feminine and masculine together, Hero is no longer Hero! A year ago, Poseidon must have known this would happen!

F-HERO

Surely the goddesses know all!

M-HERO

Then maybe no offense would be taken if we...

F-HERO

(hesitantly) What more would we ask?

M-HERO

That Hero might regain what has been lost without losing what has been gained!

F-HERO

Our body cannot *be* two sexes — even if our mind can *house* two genders! *(to herself)* Good thing we don't have another conch shell! *(to M-HERO)* We'd give offense by asking this!

M-HERO

What if *we* are being asked?

F-HERO

Do you believe that?!

M-HERO

Can you see no purpose in it? Surely, Poseidon foresaw how the High Priest would interpret your transformation and what its consequences would do to us!

F-HERO

(considering) So the Goddess of the Turning Tide first transforms me into a man so that, as a councilor, you could usher in a more just future. And now that same Fluid Goddess wills you to undergo a transformation — to somehow reconcile our past and present self?

M-HERO

That might have been the plan all along!

F-HERO

There's no way to be sure of that unless we...

(She motions towards the high window.)

M-HERO

Do you really believe Poseidon wants the female Hero who wrote all those proposals to be erased from the world so that she can't embrace that future they've made possible?

F-HERO

Lives are sacrificed for just causes all the time!

M-HERO

I wouldn't call that Justice! – and I trust Poseidon wouldn't, either!

(Excitedly, he hurries back to the window and mounts the ledge.)

A year ago you took a leap of despair. Today, take a leap of faith!

F-HERO

As I am now, I risk nothing. But you risk all in doing this!

M-HERO

I'd risk all rather than lose you!

F-HERO

(sighs) How I long to be seen and heard again!

M-HERO

Then join me at the window. We live as Hero together, or we die as Hero together.

(He extends his hand to F-HERO.)

Agreed?

F-HERO

(Pause as she considers, then nods.)

Agreed!

(She joins M-HERO on the ledge, resolutely taking his hand.)

Let Poseidon's will be done!

M-HERO

And Hero's destiny fulfilled!

(MYSIA's voice is heard outside the door at Stage Left.)

MYSIA

Hero! Open the door. I have our breakfast tray.

(F-HERO and M-HERO look to the door. MYSIA kicks at the door.)

MYSIA

Really, is it beneath the dignity of the new President of Sestos to open the door for his spouse when her hands are full?

(She manages to open the door at Stage Left and enters the bedchamber.)

(jokingly) I'll welcome no changes to the Hero I married!

(She sees M-HERO on the window ledge.)

What are you doing?!

M-HERO

I love you, Mysia! Whatever happens, remember that!

(F-HERO and M-HERO leap from the window at Stage Right. MYSIA drops the tray.)

MYSIA

(frantically) Hero, no!

(She runs to the high window and looks out over the Hellespont.)

Why, Hero?! Why?!

(Lights fade out.)

END OF ACT TWO, SCENE 2

ACT TWO, SCENE 3

On the Beach outside Hero's Tower, just before nine o'clock
on the morning of M-HERO's scheduled inauguration

(Lights suggesting a sunny autumn morning come up on the beach outside Hero's tower. On the Upstage wall is a scene of rolling hills leading to the city-state of Sestos in its Upper Stage Left corner. Upstage Center, a few feet before the back wall, stand a row of tall shrubs, forming a natural partition that the characters can move behind freely without being seen. Downstage Right, two boulders, large enough to sit upon, are placed side by side. Downstage Left, a clump of seaweed is heaped on the shore. A conch shell rests among its strands, visible but not obvious. The Hellespont occupies the "fourth wall," overlooking the audience. The sound of surf and the cry of seagulls are heard but die down once the characters appear.)

MYSIA enters from Stage Right. KELES, satchel slung over his shoulder, enters from Stage Left. It is clear they have been combing the beach for some time, as each appears tired and windswept.)

MYSIA

No sign of him over there?

KELES

Not a footprint.

MYSIA

It's been over an hour now, Keles. Hero is lost to us!

KELES

Steady, Mysia. We'll find him.

MYSIA

(plops down on a boulder)

I never should have left him alone this morning. He was talking to himself again.

KELES

Again?!

MYSIA

More like debating with an imaginary friend. – or enemy!

KELES

(sits down on the other boulder)

We all talk to ourselves, at times.

MYSIA

I had just accepted it. – especially in light of his past. Only this morning he seemed more distracted, his voice more agitated than usual.

KELES

Did he offer any explanation?

MYSIA

He *claimed* to be rehearsing his inaugural address. But I just know it was because he was back here last night. The tower stirred up his memory. Damn that High Priest!

(MYSIA puts her head in her hands. KELES places his hand on her shoulder to comfort her. Pause.)

KELES

I heard the strangest sound while I was heading back this way. As if the surf, itself, were speaking.

MYSIA

(looks up quickly)

You, too? I thought it was my imagination.

KELES

Hero survived a leap from the tower before.

(KELES stands and looks over the Hellespont.)

MYSIA

That was a miracle, Keles! How many miracles does one person get in a lifetime?

(She looks off to Stage Left.)

Someone's coming over the dune!

(She stands up quickly.)

Is it –

KELES

The High Priest!

MYSIA

If he gloats about this, I swear I'll throw sand in his face!

KELES

Don't let on that anything's wrong.

MYSIA

To what purpose?!

KELES

Just play along,

(MYSIA throws up her hands as the HIGH PRIEST enters from Stage Left.)

KELES

(cheerfully) Good morning, Excellency!

HIGH PRIEST

Well, well, Keles, I see you're ready to go! But where's Hero? Just like a wenna to be late! — Eh, my boy? No insult intended, Mysia.

MYSIA

(flatly) I consider the source before taking offense.

HIGH PRIEST

(grimaces, then hopefully to KELES,)

Keles, you look as if you haven't slept a wink.

KELES

I haven't.

HIGH PRIEST

Splendid! Mysia, you look...uh...

(He notices her disheveled condition. MYSIA runs her hands through her hair and brushes the sand from her dress.)

Have you come to walk with us to the inauguration?

MYSIA

Actually, I stayed here with Hero last night.

HIGH PRIEST

(forcing a smile through his surprise)

You did?!

(to KELES)

She did?

KELES

(smiling back)

She did, indeed. – the whole night through!

HIGH PRIEST

The whole night? Well, isn't that a surprise!

MYSIA

Not as surprising as your insistence that Hero spend the night at the tower. — on the anniversary of the most traumatic event of his life. – let alone in the history of Sestos!

HIGH PRIEST

(pointedly) Heritage and history walk hand-in-hand, my dear. – especially in Hero's case! I wanted him to consider that.

(He turns to KELES.)

So then, Keles, you didn't get *any* time alone with Hero?...to revive memories of Leander?

KELES

Hero and I shared nothing together last night, Excellency.

(The voice of F-HERO suddenly comes from the sea. Unlike in previous scenes, MYSIA, KELES, and the HIGH PRIEST can hear it.)

F-HERO

Except a decade of my writings!

(F-HERO enters Downstage Center from the audience, as if emerging from the Hellespont. She is no longer dressed in a long pale Grecian tunic, but in a unisex suit, exactly the same as the one M-HERO wore when they jumped from the tower. Miraculously, it is clean,

dry, and pressed, despite her exit from the sea. The only evidence that she has been in the surf are a few strands of seaweed on her shoulders, which she picks off and lets fall to the sand. MYSIA, KELES, and the HIGH PRIEST can now also see her, and they stand with expressions of various emotions on their faces.)

KELES

Hero?! Is that really *you*?

F-HERO

In the flesh, Sweet Keles!

MYSIA

(turning away)

Oh no!

KELES

(throwing his arms around F-HERO)

It's a miracle!

HIGH PRIEST

(gloating) Hero!

F-HERO

Keles spent the entire night in my library.

KELES

How do you know that?

F-HERO

I was there, watching you.

KELES

I didn't see you.

F-HERO

Being present doesn't always require being seen.

HIGH PRIEST

(to KELES) Did you find what I— uh — what *you* were looking for?

MYSIA

(to KELES, suspiciously) What did *he* ask you to look for?

KELES

(sidestepping MYSIA and her scrutiny)

There were dozens of notebooks in that library, Excellency, with over a hundred proposals all numbered and dated! – the ink faded, the pages yellowing. Any reasonable councilman will agree those volumes are the work of a decade.

MYSIA

(knowingly) And, ergo, of a *femele* Hero?

KELES

What's more, I found the real reason for Hero's Blessed Transformation, and it's not what we had assumed. It was in the dedication of the oldest notebook.

F-HERO

Show him, Keles.

MYSIA

Yes, Keles. Show him!

KELES

I have it right here. –

(He excitedly opens his satchel and pulls out the notebook.)

F-HERO

– It's a prayer to Poseidon, really –

MYSIA

Hero never mentioned writing a prayer to Poseidon!

F-HERO

My male gender forgot many things about being female.

KELES

(opening to the dedication page)

Here it is! In it, a hopeful young woman petitions the Fluid Godde to find a way for her to present her proposals to the Council –

F-HERO

– *without* robbing the councilmen of their free will.

KELES

She asks Poseidon to do this for her, and I quote –

F-HERO

– “Because you love me!”

KELES

Exactly!

(He closes the notebook.)

Don't you see, Excellency? Barring women from Council membership was a law made by men, according to their own will –

MYSIA

Surprise! Surprise!

KELES

— not the will of any godde! Only if Poseidon had stripped these men of their free will would a femele Hero have been allowed to join their ranks!

F-HERO

And no godde would deprive humin beings of their free will, no matter how unjust their use of it!

MYSIA

A crueler godde could have had a kinder world!

KELES

In short, there was no other way for Poseidon to grant Hero's request than by transforming her into a man!

MYSIA

(walks over to the HIGH PRIEST, gloating)

So Hero's "Blessed Transformation" was not a confirmation of men's superiority, but a condemnation of their misogyny!

KELES

The evidence supports that interpretation.

HIGH PRIEST

I'm disappointed in you, Keles. I thought we had an understanding.

KELES

I understand things differently this morning.

HIGH PRIEST

Then understand this: Your evidence is irrelevant now.

MYSIA

How can you say that?!

HIGH PRIEST

(smugly) Nothing speaks louder than Hero's own *body* of evidence – which is female again! I never denied Poseidon loved Hero in transforming her into a man. The only thing those notebooks prove is that she had abilities beyond the norms of her sex.

MYSIA

(exasperated) Unbelievable!

HIGH PRIEST

No offense intended, my dear, but that was the very reason why the Blessed Transformation was necessary in the first place!

(He turns to F-HERO.)

However, Hero, you chose to take that miracle as license to advance the “rights” of women, which was clearly *wrong* in the eyes of the Goddess. – the proof of which is this, your ...“*Blasted Transformation*”!

MYSIA

(to HIGH PRIEST) Is there nothing you won't put a misogynistic spin on?!

F-HERO

(confidently unruffled to the point of being amused by the HIGH PRIEST's remarks)

Apparently not!

HIGH PRIEST

(to F-HERO) Of course, you realize, being female again, you are ineligible to ascend to the office of President today! *(laughs)* Under the circumstances, I wouldn't be surprised if the Council decides to declare null and void all your proposals they passed into law in the last year.

MYSIA

Including a wenn's right to vote?!

HIGH PRIEST

Especially a wenn's right to vote! The politics of the city-state is no concern of wennen, my dear.

MYSIA

It is *so* our concern, and I am *not* your "dear"!

HIGH PRIEST

(*to KELES*) They're never so amusing as when they're feisty!

MYSIA

So went the famous last words of King Pentheus before the "feisty" maenads of Thebes tore him apart limb from limb!

KELES

(*nods*) Led by his own mother, no less!

HIGH PRIEST

(*to F-HERO*) Why you would want to be a member of the irrational sex is beyond me!

F-HERO

(*calmly*) To which sex are you referring?

HIGH PRIEST

Yesterday, I warned you Poseidon would punish you for your obstinance.— and look at you now!

F-HERO

Never take up divination, High Priest. Blind prejudice and clear-sightedness don't mix!

HIGH PRIEST

Come now, Hero! Do you expect me to believe you threw yourself into the Hellespont —a second time — in the hopes of regaining your female form?

MYSIA

Hero?

F-HERO

(gently) I couldn't bear to live without my wifhood, Mysia. Surely, *you* can understand that.

MYSIA

But you were my spouse! – The father of our unborn child!

KELES

Father?!

F-HERO

(to MYSIA) That hasn't changed.

MYSIA

I married a *man!* – a man who claimed to love me!

(MYSIA runs behind the shrubs; F-HERO follows her.)

F-HERO

Mysia, wait!

(MYSIA reappears on the other side of the shrubs followed by M-HERO. He wears the same unisex suit as he did at the end of Act Two, Scene 2.)

M-HERO

I *do* love you! I *am* the man you married! – Mysia!

MYSIA

(turns and faces him, then steps back in amazement)

Hero?!

KELES

(looks behind the shrubs, then to M-HERO.)

How did you do that? — You were a wenn a second ago!

M-HERO

Another gift of the Fluid Godde.

HIGH PRIEST

(astonished) Poseidon's trident!

(He slowly walks around HERO, who morphs from M-HERO to F-HERO and back to M-HERO again. This and future shapeshifting is accomplished by the actors playing F-HERO and M-HERO stepping in front of and behind each other so that only the speaking HERO is seen at any one time.)

You've become a shapeshifter!

M-HERO

For the past year, my sex was male, so everyone assumed my gender was masculine. And while that was true quite often, it wasn't the full story.

(M-HERO morphs into F-HERO.)

F-HERO

My feminine gender still existed but, lacking female form, moved through the world like a ghost — unseen, unheard, unrecognized. I couldn't go on like that. I needed my female body back!

(F-HERO morphs into M-HERO.)

M-HERO

But, at the same time, I couldn't bear to give up my new life as a male with you, Mysia! Fortunately, the Fluid Godde already had a plan —

(M-HERO morphs into F-HERO.)

F-HERO

to allow me to regain what had been lost —

(F-HERO morphs into M-HERO.)

M-HERO

— without losing what has been gained!

HIGH PRIEST

How convenient for you, Hero! — You can execute your public duties as President in male form and see to hearth and home as a female.

MYSIA

Home is the last place I want *him* to be female!

KELES

Then maybe *she* should find a man who appreciates her native sex!

M-HERO

Or maybe everyone should accept that from now on —

(M-HERO morphs into F-HERO.)

F-HERO

— I will take either form I choose,

(F-HERO morphs into M-HERO.)

M-HERO

— wherever I choose,

(M-HERO morphs into F-HERO.)

F-HERO

— whenever I choose,

(F-HERO morphs into M-HERO.)

M-HERO

— whyever I choose!

(M-HERO morphs into F-HERO.)

F-HERO

And that's an end to it!

KELES

Is anybody else dizzy?

HIGH PRIEST

You will not take the Oath of Office today as a femele!

F-HERO

I could do so without you even realizing it!

HIGH PRIEST

Nonsense! I'm administering the oath! Surely, I'll see which sex you are as you stand before me!

F-HERO

I'm standing before you right now. Which sex am I?

(The actor playing F-HERO takes a step to her right, and the one playing M-HERO steps up beside her on her left. They take hands. In this new "sense-shaping" mode, there is no need for the actors playing the HEROs to exchange places in front of and behind each other. It is assumed that the HERO speaking is the one who is seen and heard by the character being addressed, although another character may see and hear HERO as the opposite sex at the same time. Handholding is the signal to the audience that HERO is sense-shaping, controlling how each individual perceives their body and voice at the moment, rather than shapeshifting, where HERO's body actually shifts between sexes with everyone sees and hears HERO in that same, shifted sex.)

HIGH PRIEST

(falling back on a boulder in amazement)

What is this!

KELES

Excellency, what's the matter?

HIGH PRIEST

Don't you see them?

MYSIA

Them?!

KELES

I see Hero. She's standing right next to me.

MYSIA

(to KELES) You mean *he* is!

KELES

I know a wrenn when I see one!

MYSIA

Apparently not!

F-HERO & M-HERO

Can't you trust your five senses?

KELES

(to MYSIA) Ah! Hear that clear soprano voice!

MYSIA

(to KELES) It was clearly tenor!

KELES

(to F-HERO) Give me your hand.

(KELES takes F-HERO's free hand.)

Just as I thought! – Skin as smooth as satin!

MYSIA

(to M-HERO) Let me feel your cheek.

(She strokes M-HERO's face)

Stubbly, as expected! You really should have shaved this morning.

KELES

(smells F-HERO's hair) What's that alluring scent you're wearing?

F-HERO

(flatly) Seaweed.

HIGH PRIEST

Stop it, all of you!

(He rises from the boulder.)

The Fluid Godde has lavished an unnatural fluidity upon you, Hero! — The ability to trick our five senses into perceiving you as either sex you wish – and at the same time?!

KELES

You mean while I'm seeing, hearing, and holding the hand of a wenn —

MYSIA

I'm seeing, hearing, and stroking the cheek of a man?

M-HERO

(nods) Perception-wise, yes!

F-HERO

Poseidon calls this final gift "Sense-Shaping."

MYSIA

Is there no way for us to know which sex your body truly is at this moment?

M-HERO

(gently, to MYSIA) Not unless I tell you.

KELES

Now that's what I call the Ultimate Transformation!

HIGH PRIEST

The Ultimate Deception!

MYSIA

The Ultimate Miracle to foil the Ultimate Misogynist!

F-HERO

Of course, if the Equal Rights Bill currently under consideration by the Council were to become law today —

M-HERO

— there would be no need for any deception!

MYSIA

(triumphantly) Poseidon's will must be clear now even to you, High Priest!

HIGH PRIEST

I'm sure that pleases you no end, Mysia.

(The HIGH PRIEST sits down on a boulder to process the meaning of what has happened.)

HIGH PRIEST

As a boy, I was taught Male Privilege was the Goddess' will.

KELES

As was I!

HIGH PRIEST

I have always believed it unquestioningly.

KELES

Why question any belief that flatters?!

HIGH PRIEST

I spread that belief! I taught it in the classroom, preached in the temple, advised it in the Council Hall! I praised the order it had established and upheld in society throughout the centuries. It was the bedrock of civilization. – The core foundation of my life! Believing it, I walked on stable ground, sure of my footing. Now, I find the earth quaking beneath my feet, and Poseidon expecting me to welcome in the tsunami about to overrun our shore?! – profess that, all along, Male Privilege had not been the will of the Goddess but merely the whim of men?!

MYSIA

Justice is carried on the tide of change!

HIGH PRIEST

The tide is a powerful force of Nature...and one of the most devastating! (*rises*) Hero, I can no longer deny that Poseidon has chosen you to initiate such change. I will not stand against the Goddess' will, but neither can I serve it. (*sighs*) We will go to Sestos together and call an emergency meeting of the Council. Keles, you will present the notebook with its dedication, and Hero, you will demonstrate your powers of shapeshifting and sense-shaping to the amazement of all. The Council will vote to pass the Equal Rights Bill, even if some do so begrudgingly. Then, in whichever form you chose, Hero, I will swear you in as President of Sestos. (*nods*) That will be my last act as High Priest.

F-HERO

You have acknowledged this change is Godde's will. —

M-HERO

Keep your office and help me bring about an equitable society!

HIGH PRIEST

Easier for you to change your sex than for me to change my ways! I am not alone in that. There will be repercussions for my doing this much! *(Pause)* You have the notebook, Keles?

KELES

(He pats his satchel.)

Right here!

HIGH PRIEST

Then lead the way.

(KELES and the HIGH PRIEST exit Stage Left. HERO shapeshifts into M-HERO. It is accomplished this time by the actor playing F-HERO slipping behind the shrubs as unnoticeably as possible.)

MYSIA

Your "radical" agenda takes a giant leap forward today!

M-HERO

The High Priest is right, though; there will be repercussions.

MYSIA

I'm not going anywhere. *(Pause)* So which will it be? Will you take the Oath of Office today openly and legally as a femele or like this?

M-HERO

Is that your subtle way of asking which sex I actually am at the moment? I will always be male when we are alone together, my love. I promise you that.

MYSIA

But your feminine gender can now reclaim this body any time she wants. – And she wants Keles! I'm no fool, Hero. I realize the man who promised to love, honor, and cherish me never dreamed of being able to regain female form.

M-HERO

Nor does he regret making those promises to you! I don't know what tomorrow will bring Mysia — in my political or personal life. I know only that I want to face that future with you.

(KELES's voice is heard calling from Offstage.)

KELES

Hero!

(Sense-shaping, the actor playing F-HERO inconspicuously reemerges from behind the shrubs and steps up next to M-HERO. The HEROs take hands as KELES reenters from Stage Left.)

KELES

(to F-HERO) Hero! Mysia! Are you coming? The High Priest wants to –
(He imitates HIGH PRIEST.)

“Get this mummery over with as fast as possible.” His word, not mine.

F-HERO

I recognize the tone. We best be going!

(F-HERO steps forward, extending her free hand to KELES, who takes it happily. M-HERO extends his free hand to MYSIA.)

M-HERO

Are you with me, Mysia?

MYSIA

You're asking a lot, you know. But like I said —

(She resolutely taking M-HERO's hand.)

I'm not going anywhere!

(HIGH PRIEST reenters from Stage Left.)

HIGH PRIEST

Get a move on, you three...or four! The special Council meeting will push back the entire day's proceedings.

MYSIA

We're on our way, High Priest!

F-HERO

All three —

M-HERO

— or four — of us!

KELES

Which brings up an interesting question, Excellency. I see Hero as a wenn; Mysia sees her —

MYSIA

– *him!*

KELES

– as a man. How do you see Hero?

(ALL look at the HIGH PRIEST.)

HIGH PRIEST

How else? — As the bane of my existence!

M-HERO

Well, at least, you can take solace in the beautiful order of *that* continuity, High Priest!

F-HERO

I plan to be the bane of injustice for many years into the future!

(KELES, F-HERO, M-HERO, and MYSIA laugh and exit Stage Left In high spirits. The HIGH PRIEST watches the hopeful young people disappear out of sight and then turns and looks out over the audience as over the Hellespont.)

HIGH PRIEST

Hope! How well the word reads on a campaign poster! But old injustices die hard with their most hardened adherents. Too often in human history has the attempt to rectify a Society of Suppressed Chaos led instead to one of Overt Chaos!

(He takes a step forward and his foot taps against the conch shell resting in the clump of seaward.)

What's this?

(He bends down and picks up the conch shell.)

HIGH PRIEST

A conch shell! Some say they harbor messages from Poseidon.

(He puts it up to his ear for a second. Then takes it away, shaking his head.)

All I've ever heard is the sea!

(He turns the conch shell in his hands, pondering, as he walks slowly to Center Stage and stops.)

Others swear that a fervent prayer whispered into it and thrown back into the waves is sure to find its way to the Fluid Godde.

(He holds the conch shell up again and speaks into it.)

Great Poseidon, Godde of the Turning Tide, guard Sestos from the wrath of those whose only source of self-esteem is their bigotry! Let Hero's Agenda of Justice, which you so favor, truly lead, this time, to a Society of True Order!

(He lowers the conch shell and smiles, having caught himself in a moment of superstitious wishful thinking. He bends down and lays the shell on the sand at Center Stage. Rising, he comments to the audience directly.)

Hope! Is there any trait so naïve and yet so necessary?

(The HIGH PRIEST turns and exits Stage Left. The sound of surf and seagulls come up as the spotlight slowly zooms in on the conch shell. There is a sudden unearthly sound, and the conch shell starts to move Downstage Center, seemingly of its own accord, where it falls off the edge of the stage as if into the Hellespont. Lights fade out.)

END OF ACT TWO, SCENE 3

END OF PLAY

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