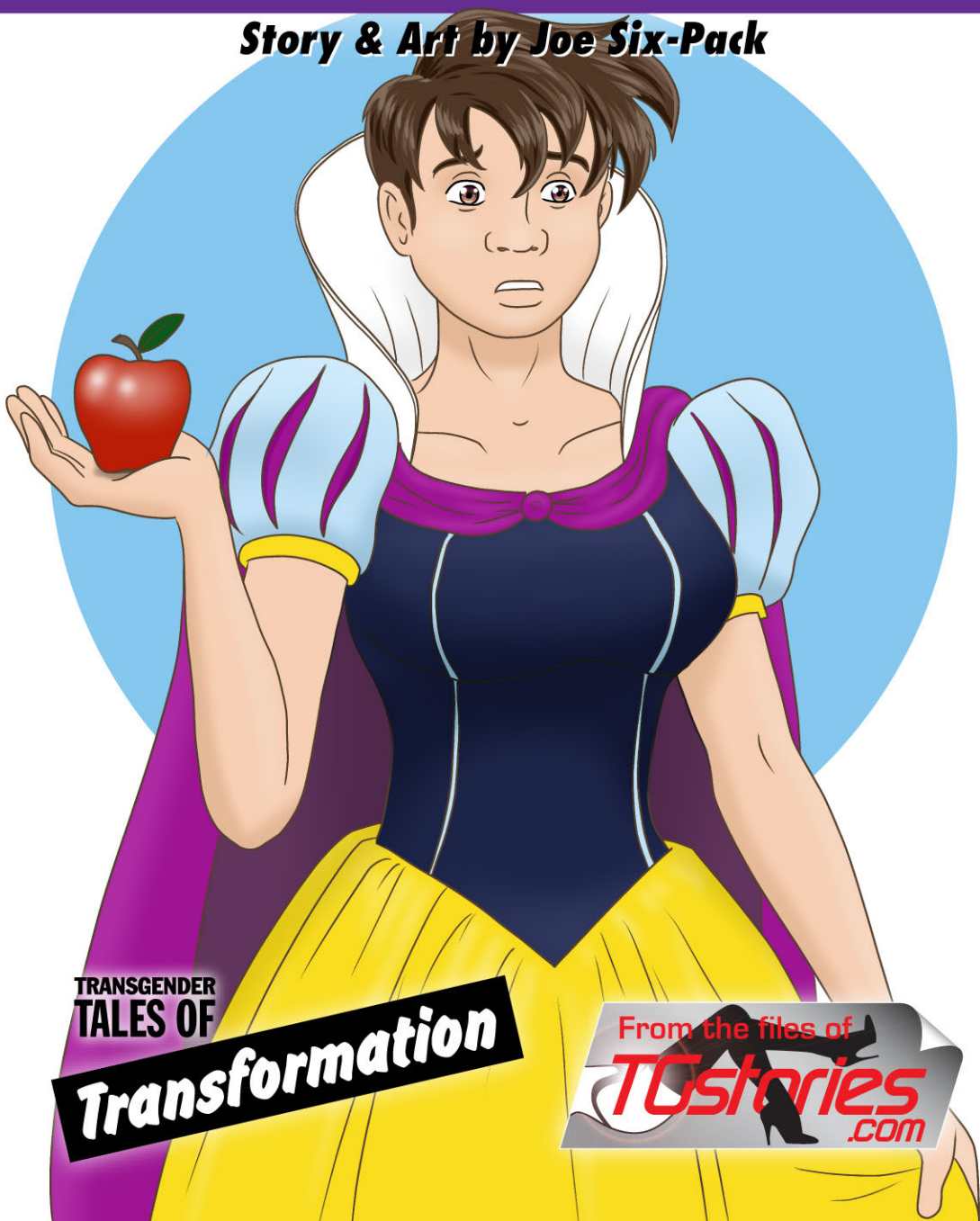


ADULTS ONLY

62 pages 21 illustrations

THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



TRANSGENDER
TALES OF

Transformation

From the files of

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.com

J O E S I X P A C K

THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack

Based on the story "The Magic Kingdom" as published on TGStories.com

A Teens Transformed story



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THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL



Keith was sitting down on the bench in front of his locker when a pile of clothes on two spindly legs came walking towards him. It was breathing heavily, wheezing slightly, and wandering a little off course. He was impressed that it navigated through the maze of employees and various discarded garments in the locker room seemingly without the power of sight. It froze in front of Keith and appeared to be sizing him up.

Keith took one look at the pile of clothes and realized something needed to be pointed out. The costume that was resting on top of the pile was not supposed to be in this room. “Hey, dudette. This is the *guy’s* locker room.”

It was a costume he was well familiar with, the iconic billowy blue and yellow dress worn by Snow White. He was familiar with it, because his job was to be the Prince. Snow White’s prince. He worked here in Anaheim, California at the Magic Kingdom as a performing live character, or “cast member,” as they called it. He was the on third shift of the Princes, working the West gate. Usually he worked with a girl by the name of Melissa who was the Snow White for that shift. But Melissa was off for a few weeks, and he was told he would be working with some new person today. By the looks of it, she had accidentally entered the wrong locker room.

“No, this is the right one,” the pile replied with a heavy sigh. The load of fabric dropped to the ground, leaving a scrawny kid behind. He was maybe seventeen or eighteen and was a walking skeleton with a messy mop of brown hair that hid most of his face. “Anybody using this locker?” The kid asked Keith.

“Uh-uh,” Keith said in the negative. “Well, if you’re in the right room, then you’ve got the wrong...”

“No. No I don’t,” the kid interrupted. His tone was one of resigned embarrassment. He plopped himself on the bench. “This is the right costume, I’m in the right room, and my life sucks.” He lifted his hung head to be polite and address the man talking to him. “My name’s Will.”

“Keith,” Keith replied in kind. “You mean, you’re going to be Snow White? The Snow White who wears a dress? The *female* Snow White?”

“The same,” Will said, as he kicked the pile closer to his new locker. “I had to get a summer job, and this was the only place hiring. The guy who interviewed me...”

“Vinnie?”



“That’s the one. Vinnie said that he’d take me on, but I’d have to work a tough shift for a week or two until a slot opened up for me as Pinocchio or something. Tough shift is right.”

“Vinnie hired you as a replacement for a *female* character?” Keith said, still trying to solidify the situation in his mind. “Dude. That can’t be right. Vinnie wouldn’t do that. He knows better.”

“He told me it had something to do with the union.”

Keith nodded his head. Now he understood. As actors, all of the “cast members” were required to be part of the actor’s guild, and they had some pretty

tough rules for the park. One of them was a mandate that the park maintain a fifty percent male/female ratio, and this place had far more female characters than male. There were tons of princesses. Sometimes they would just hire guys to meet the requirements and they would sit at home collecting a paycheck. Obviously, the situation had come to a predictable but ridiculous result. They needed a guy to play a female part to meet the union rule.

Keith shook his head in disbelief. “Yeah. Uh, hey. You wait here. I have to ask Vinnie a few questions.” Keith rose to his feet, his well-built body clad only in his boxer briefs. He was in his mid twenties with shaggy, neck-length sun-streaked brown hair and sported a California surfer’s tan. At one time Keith had been an aspiring actor, but then had found a better life as a surfer. He lived to chase waves on the coast, and this job left him with the free time to do just that. The job was low-paying, slightly humiliating, and he lived with just the bare essentials — but he was content just the same.

“Vinnie!” Keith called after the squat, balding man who sat in his office. It was connected to the locker room, where Vinnie was essentially the dispatcher for the cast members.

Vinnie put down the cell phone he was texting on. “Cutler,” he said, recognizing Keith and calling him by his last name. “What’s yer problem?”

“The kid...” Keith started to say.

Vinnie needed no more information. He already knew what Keith’s beef was. “Don’t get on me about this, Cutler! I didn’t have a choice! Union rules, and...”

“The union’s had this rule for fifteen years, dude,” Keith pointed out. “Why do this now?”

“I got pressures, Cutler!” he growled. “Pressures your spacious mind can’t even comprehend!”

“Hey, I get where you’re coming from, guy. I appreciate your hard work here.” Keith had a talent for non-confrontational confrontation. “I understand that all you want to do is to provide a great experience for our guests. You do a great job, dude. Hiring a guy to play a princess is certainly a new step. How does that help our mission to create a magical experience for the guests?”

“Fuck you,” Vinnie replied. “I gotta do what I gotta do or I get canned.” He went back to his phone. “Take your problems and can cram it.”

Keith turned back into the locker room. He saw that Will had disrobed and was staring into a mirror with a dead expression on his face, like he was about to go to war. He was sorry for the kid. Will had been trapped in a pretty awful situation. He wasn’t going to get to play another part, if he knew Vinnie. The kid would just get fired when he wasn’t needed anymore. Worse yet, Keith was the guy who was going to have to act with him for the next few hours. It was trouble enough to break in a new girl to do the act, and this was going to be an outright ordeal.

What Will needed, Keith thought to himself, was a friend to get through this day. He needed someone to give him a boost. If Keith were a better man, he would have walked right over and pledge mentorship. Unfortunately, at this exact moment in time, Keith felt like he really needed to sit on the toilet for about fifteen minutes.

By the time he returned to his locker, the bench was empty and all of Will's clothes had been hung up in his locker. Keith got his costume on quickly, got his stage makeup done by the makeup people and ran it by Vinnie to make sure everything was approved. When he stepped outside into the hallway, Snow White was waiting for him. Keith's eyes were in danger of popping from their sockets, as he was amazed to see Will in costume.

"Yeah. It's a little freaky isn't it?" Will's voice said, coming from the pretty girl's mouth. "That's probably the only reason I got the job. They tested out the makeup when I interviewed. It worked pretty well."

Keith was in agreement with that. Once you got the shaggy hair out of the way and tucked it under the wig, once you got the face covered in pancake makeup, once you fit his slender body in the constricting costume — it was obvious. Now he understood why Vinnie had hired him. If a man could be born to play Snow White, Will was it. "They're payin' you extra for this, right?" Keith asked.

"Oh yeah," Will said slyly. "Time and a half."

Keith shrugged, accepting this ludicrous notion that now seemed to make perfect sense. A man could pretend to be girl and get away with it. Reality was taking a holiday. *Que sera sera*. "Hey, this way," he said, walking through a door into a small, badly-lit passageway. "This tunnel will lead us out to the hedges behind the Sebastian's Caribbean Seafood hut. We'll wait for the previous shift to come off, and we'll slip into the crowd to take their places. A plainclothes security man will be around to make sure everything goes smooth. You've already gone through training and been over the basics with Vinnie, right?"

"Yeah. A few times," Will said, showing his nervousness in his voice.

"Don't worry about it. It's a breeze. Just don't scare the kids, never refuse a photo request, and ham it up with any dwarves you see. Simple stuff."

Will cleared his throat with a deep rumble of his vocal chords. "Got it."

"Voice!" Keith suddenly realized. "Your voice!" That was going to give everything away.

"I'll just keep quiet," Will said. "I was told that's okay."

"Just mime it," Keith agreed. "I had to do that when I was the White Rabbit."

The doorway cracked open and the previous Prince & Snow White entered, meaning it was time for Will & Keith to step out into the sunlight.





Will clinked his root beer bottle with Keith's hard lemonade. "To survival," he said, toasting.

The two had settled into a nearby restaurant, called "Harpoon Harry's," where Will was letting the anxiety of the day flow out of him. It was Keith's usual hangout, and he liked it because it was dingy and nobody from work ever showed up here. He could say the nastiest things about his coworkers and not get in trouble.

It was the first time he'd ever had anyone from the park here. That was because he admired the kid's guts. He had not only made it through his first day, but he was a natural. Will was great with kids, and had a knack for getting even the shyest to smile.

Parents had a nasty habit of shoving their frightened kids at them, convinced that the kids' reserved attitude would change when they were face to face with scary giants in strange costumes. It's the one thing that made Keith miserable when he worked the crowd. Fortunately, Will was brilliant at drawing out laughs and giggles. Plus, he did it all in a dress, without speaking a word. The kid had balls, and that's why he had let the Will come to his secret little hide-out.

"Another day, another urine stain on my costume," Keith said, returning the toast. "Dude, you can do this job in your sleep."

Will smirked. "Thanks. You been doing this long?"

"Three years now. I started as a teacup," Keith replied. "It's not bad work. It's never dull, that's for sure."

"I can see that. It felt like we were out there for twenty hours."

"It'll fly by before you know it," Keith said, gesturing with his hand gliding through the air.

"Good. I really need the money if I want to go to college."

"Dude, I've never been convinced college was worth it. Look at me. I didn't go to college."

"And you work at a theme park in a costume."

"Yeeeah... Point taken."



As a part of the park's schedule, at four-thirty every day, "The Prince" and "Snow White" would work their way over to a platform and do a little karaoke routine with the dwarves, mouthing along to a prerecorded track of bad jokes

and insipid songs. Every day they would get the same polite applause that felt like pity.

Still, it was the highlight of the day for the cast members, not because of the chance to perform — they rightfully hated it — but because it was the end of the shift. Once they had finished the lip-synch to the thirty-year-old backing track, they would work through the crowd before ducking into the bushes and back into the tunnel, where the next shift was waiting to go on.

On this day, as Keith and a few assorted dwarves danced around like drugged marionettes, all they could think about was getting out of there. They had two songs and a short performance in between them, and as listless as most of the performers were, one was putting all his heart and soul into it.

Maybe it was because Will hadn't been jaded by the day-in day-out drudgery of the profession, and maybe it was because he was still trying to figure things out even after a week on the job. But to the person viewing the spectacle, it was a heartwarming, earnest performance. The gathered crowd of small children and adults all smiled, and some sang along. They enjoyed the performance in a way Keith had never seen from the crowd before.

The kids jumped and squealed, laughing and giggling. Their big eyes were transfixed on Will, like he was made of candy. Keith was convinced that they were under a spell of some sort. They absolutely loved this Snow White.

Across the way, and high up in an office building concealed by a pirate ship, there was one person who was getting far more out of the performance than even the children. His name was Stan Bergstein, the Head of Park Operations, and the most powerful man in this unincorporated city. It was on his whims that decided the volume of tourism in the metropolis. At his word, he could shut the local businesses down, destroy tax revenue and put thousands on unemployment. Yet he could just as easily overflow the town's coffers with gold. Unfortunately, Stan was just the sort of person who made sure you never forgot how important he was.

Every day around this time, he made sure he was at the window to watch the little stage performance below him. Snow White was his favorite. His grandfather had created her, practically. It was his most cherished memory of his youth, watching Snow White in the theater for the first time. He knew the songs by heart. He knew all the lines by heart. He always loved seeing the girls who worked as Snow White dressed in that amazing costume. Stan sat there for the entire time on his windowsill, unable to hear the sound, but singing along in his own head.

In the last few days, he had been paying extra close attention. He noticed something different. To the untrained eye, all the girls looked the same in costume. But he could spot the changes. He could tell. Since Monday, he had taken notice of a new Snow White. A beautiful, lovely creature that wasn't just playing the part.

Other girls he had seen in that costume were Hollywood rejects and clumsy beauty queens, but this girl was the genuine article. She wasn't acting the part, she was *living* the part. Her movements were unconsciously graceful and natural. Her smile was infectious and inviting. She was the type of girl you wanted to embrace and hold tight, as you buried your face in that thick ebony hair and massaged that perfect ivory skin.

This new girl was better than anyone he'd ever seen. She *was* Snow White. The Snow White of his dreams — and yes, he did dream of her.

This was the girl Stan had been waiting for. This could finally be *his* Snow White.



Not too many days later, Will and Keith were slowly getting into costume for another shift. The two coworkers had been bullshitting each other for a few minutes as they readied themselves for the afternoon.

“She nearly ripped up everything I owned before she finally left. It was my name on the lease, after all,” Will said, continuing the story he was telling.

Keith nodded. “Gingers are nuts. Seriously.”

“I’m a sucker for redheads. I’m sure I’ll get burnt



again.” Will unboxed his wig, fresh from the costume department. “What about you?” he asked Keith.

Keith reflected for a moment. “I suppose the craziest girl I ever knew was Penny. She was from Baltimore. She moved out here to be a surfer chick, and boy she had the body for it.”

“Thin? Tan? Blonde?” Will inquired.

“Thin where you wanted it, thick were you liked it. She was beautiful.” Keith stepped into his big grey costume boots. “But she was, y’know, tryin’ too hard. She couldn’t relax and take it easy. Couldn’t surf worth a crap, either.”

“That doesn’t sound crazy.”

“Well, not in public. But in the sack?”

“Whoa!” Will said with a grin. “What type of crazy are we talkin’ about?”

“She... Liked her... Toys,” Will said, carefully. “S&M. She just was way too intense for me. For anyone, probably.”

Will checked the time. “You need to tell me more about this girl when we’re done.”

“Yeah... I dunno, Will,” Keith said, playing at rubbing his chin in thought. “It was kinda intimate. I’d need you to buy the drinks if I were, y’know, going to entertain the idea of reflecting on such personal issues.”

“I *always* buy the drinks,” Will replied.

“You *always* want me to talk.”

The two spent a few minutes in makeup, then stepped over to Vinnie’s office for inspection, and he waved them on through with little care. They made their way down the tunnel and waited by the doorway to make their subdued entrance. As the previous duo entered, Keith high-fived the Prince. “Angels took it 6-2, my man.”

The departing Prince grimaced. “Not even gonna be in the wild card this year.”

“Such is life,” Keith said.

As they stepped into the light, they were held by the security people for a moment as they cleared some crowd space. Keith looked over to Will, who had his neck craned into the air. “What?” Keith asked.

“Do these buildings have people in them?” Will asked. He was referring to the large, seemingly innocuous buildings that appeared to have no function other than to be a backdrop and divide the park.

“Heck, yeah,” Keith said. “These aren’t fake. Every building has offices, storage and stuff. There’s even a health club behind the bear ride over there.”

“What about that one?” Will pointed to a building behind a pirate ship that was a story above any other.

“That’s the executive office. Why?”

“There’s always someone up there in the window. Watching. Kinda creepy.”

“Don’t worry about it. We’re on.” Keith took Will by the hand and gallantly led Snow White out into the crowd. Why he was holding Will’s hand, he didn’t know. That wasn’t something he usually did.

All that day, Will was off his game. By the time the shift was over, Keith was a little worried. When kids cried or backed away from Snow White, he seemed to lack the magic touch. At the lip-sync performance, Will seemed to be unusually distracted. He was always glancing up at that tower. A few times Keith had whispered into his ear, asking if he was okay, but Will kept waving him off. It was in the middle of the second song that Will seemed to snap out of it. He straightened up, put a smile on and put in his usual show-stopping performance.

Keith had to step up his game working with Will. He had been slacking for a little while at his job, maybe a few months, but now that Will was practically bringing down the house with every show, Keith was trying to match his energy. Today, he thought Will was turning it down a notch, but all the sudden he was throwing his arms around dramatically, sweeping his body across the stage and hamming it up twice as much as he ever had before.

“You okay, Will?” He asked, when they stepped into the access tunnel.

“Was a little out of it, but I’m okay now,” he answered. “I mean, if that guy is gonna watch, let him watch.”

“What guy?”

“The guy in the tower.”

Will looked over his shoulder, up at the executive office. He didn’t see anything.

On the way back to the locker room through the narrow tunnel, they turned a corner and nearly ran into someone. Someone who was waiting there for them. Keith suffered a minor conniption upon seeing who it was: Stan Bergstein, the über-boss of the park. He had never actually seen him in person, only on training videos and pictures in the employee newsletter. But there was no mistaking the shiny bald head and hawk-like nose.

“Just wanted to tell you that you’re doing a fantastic job here,” Stan said, gripping Keith’s hand in a vigorous shake. “The company always appreciates hard workers like you two, and I’m sure our guests appreciate it as well. You’re making a lot of little children very, very happy.”

“Thur... Th... Thanks.” Keith choked out.

“Thank you, sir,” Stan said. He stopped shaking Keith’s hand and reached out to Will. “You too, Miss.”

“No sweat,” Will replied.

Alarm bells went off in Keith’s mind. This idiot was under the impression Will was female. The most dangerous man in the park, a man who could fire the both of them and blacklist them from getting another job, had a look on his face that could only be described as horrified. He needed to think of something, fast, before Stan caught on.

Keith whapped Will on the back with his hand. “Hey, you okay there? Frog in your throat? He continued to pat Will on the back. You sound like your voice is getting deeper, like you’re catching a cold.”

Will was confused. “My voice? What are you...?” he was without a clue.

Keith hit him on the back again, harder. “That’s one bad frog in your throat! You almost don’t sound like a girl, there.”

“Oh.” Will suddenly grasped the problem. He didn’t want to get caught as a man playing a female character. That would be pretty embarrassing. Also, unemployment. “Oh!” He coughed as effeminately as he knew how. “I think I just need a lozenge,” he said in an uneven falsetto.

Stan put his hand on Will’s shoulder to comfort him. “I hope you feel better soon, uh...” He was searching for a name to complete the sentence.

“Will.” Will said before thinking. “Er...” He had made a mistake. “Mee... Nah.” He added.

“Willamena,” Stan restated. “That’s a name you don’t hear very often. But it’s very nice.”

“Thank you. It’s been in the family for generations.” Will was wincing slightly from the mental pain of what he had just done. “But people just call me Willie. Or just Will.”

“Do you mind if I call you Willie? You’re new here, aren’t you?” Stan asked. By this time he had placed himself between Keith and Will, separating the two.

Keith recognized the move. It was the “get lost, she’s mine,” move guys made in bars. His boss was making a pass at one of his employees. And *exactly* the wrong employee at that.

A devious thought crept into Keith’s mind. “Hey, I’ll see you, Willie. Catch you later!” Keith said, as he took a step away. He had no intention of actually leaving, but he wanted to see Will’s expression when he threatened to. Not to disappoint, all of Will’s teeth were exposed by his angry smile, and his eyes became saucers.

“Don’t go Keith,” Will said through his tensed face. “I’ve got to get that... Thing... From you... *Right now!*”

Keith played along. “Oh, yeah. The thing. Well, I guess we have to go do that now. Before it’s too late.”

Stan was disheartened at the turn in the conversation. He was trying to ask his dream girl a question. “Well, don’t let me keep you. But, uh... Would you mind if I gave you a call?” He asked Will.

Will didn’t see how he could say anything but yes to that, so he fought for an excuse. “I don’t have a pen or paper...” It didn’t even really occur to him why Stan would want to call him.

“I can look it up in the employee records.” Stan answered.

“Well, then, yeah. Okay. Sure.” Will wanted out, so he sidestepped past Stan to join Keith. “Nice to meet you.”

“A pleasure,” Stan said.

The two men scrambled out of view of their boss and kept on going until they got to the locker room.

“Ha!” Will said, looking triumphant. “He doesn’t know my last name. He won’t be able to find me in the employee records. He’ll never call me.”

Keith swiveled his head around. “Shit,” he said, angrily.

“What?”

“Well, he better be able to find you in the employee records! What do you think will happen if he can’t?”

“Um, he’ll...”

“Find us again, figure out who you are, and we all get our asses kicked.” He looked around and shouted. “Vinnie!”

“Oh for God’s sake, Keith. Don’t tell him, he’d just laugh.”

“He won’t laugh. He’s in as deep as you are. We’re going to have to get your records changed if we all want to keep our jobs and avoid a lawsuit.”

“But he still doesn’t know my last name.” Will said.

“How many ‘Wills’ you think work here as Snow White, bonehead?”



Later that night, Stan was as tense as he had been in years. He didn’t even get this stressed when he was negotiating multi-billion dollar contracts or optioning his billions of dollars of stock. He was literally wringing his hands with apprehension. Stan hadn’t ever asked a girl out. He hadn’t even dated. Stan just met girls at functions and took them to hotel rooms. His one marriage was started when he wanted to keep his name out of the papers for sleeping with a New England socialite — not exactly a romance to crow about. It ended in disaster.

Stan had picked up the phone a half dozen times already, and tried to get himself to dial. But he was still having trouble going through with it. He practiced deep breathing, picturing a calm ocean and clearing his mind. When he opened his eyes, his knuckles were still white, clutching the phone. He really just needed to suck it up and dial the number.

He put the phone down and walked over to the closet. He pushed his clothes aside to reveal a panel built into the back wall. He pressed some numbers on a security pad, and the panel whisked open. There, carefully lighted and elegantly presented against a black velvet background, was a dress. A dress made of fine silk and satin. It shone in the light. It was dark blue, with light blue puffy sleeves, a bright yellow skirt and a high white collar.

“Finally,” he said to the dress. “All these years of waiting.”



“Dude,” Keith said, upon seeing Will for the first time that day.

“Dude,” Will replied. He sat down on the locker room bench with a heavy thud.

“Mr. Bergstein called you?”

“Emailed me. Oh, and he wants me to call him ‘Stan.’” Will said, looking sick to his stomach.

Keith laughed heartily. He nearly tumbled off the bench, fighting through his convulsive guffawing. He righted himself eventually, but only after his face had gone beet red. “Man, what’d he say when you told him off?”

Will turned his back to his friend.

“What’d he say?” Still, Keith got no response. “Dude, you told him off, right?”

“Hrmb! mrmgl,” Will said, mumbling. His head was buried in his locker.

Keith’s joyous expression, expecting tales of executive humiliation, tightened up a bit. “What?”

“I just emailed him and said I was busy,” Will replied. “He didn’t write back.”

“Yeah, that’ll put an end to it,” Keith said, sarcastically.

Will threw his hands in the air. “Well, what am I supposed to do? I’ve never had to tell a guy off before.” He picked up his costume from the locker and peeled the plastic off of it. “Especially one that could fire me. This is messed up.”

“Another coming of age moment for you, Will,” Keith kidded.

“Thanks for the help,” Will picked up the costume and held it out at arms’ length. “Does this look weird to you?”



“A guy putting on a dress? Yes.”

“No, no. I mean this dress. It looks different.”

“Hold it up,” Keith asked. Will put it in full view. “Yeeeeaaaah,” he said, considering it. “It looks a little bit better than the usual one. It’s shinier.”

“It’s like satin or silk. Not that usual wipe-off plastic stuff we get.”

“It’s wipe-off for a reason, dude. Be thankful for that when the next ten kids barf on you.”

Will went through his usual routine. He disrobed from his jeans and checked shirt, t-shirt and socks and shoes. He put on the undergarment — he wasn’t about to think of it as a corset, which was what it really was — and then the tights.

He picked up the dress again and fought with its thick layers of material, to position it where he could get it over his head. “It tingles,” he said to Keith.

“Static electricity?” Keith ventured.

“Probably.” He hoisted the dress over his head and let his arms work it down to rest. “Not as heavy as it looks.” He wrapped the cape around his neck. “Fits nice.”

“I bet it’s some old version they had back in the laundry.”

Will took a whiff. “It smells old.”

“You wanna get a different one?”

“I’m good,” he said, sitting down. He slipped his feet into the black flats he wore with the outfit. “Meet you in makeup,” he said, leaving.

Meanwhile, Keith had finished with his costume, in the powder-blue pants tucked into his big grey boots, a blue tunic with gold trim over his blousy cream-colored shirt, and a red cape.

“Hi ho,” Keith said to himself and walked to the makeup room.



“There you go. Congratulations, it’s a girl,” Vinnie said, handing over a plastic employee badge to Will.

Will took it and looked at it closely. It was simply a placard that had his face, his name, a picture and his job on it. The problem was, the name read “Willamena.”

Keith, who had been talking to someone else, broke it off and wandered over. “Congratulations. It’s a girl.”

“Original,” Vinnie said. He snapped his fingers in front of Will’s face to get his attention. “I know this is just a goofy little thing we gotta do, but it wouldn’t hurt if you didn’t act... Unnecessarily masculine around here.”

“You want me to act like a girl here?”

“Nah,” Vinnie said. “Don’t get me wrong, but you’re not exactly the manliest man in the universe, you understand?”

“I suppose,” Will replied.

“So just don’t go all lumberjack. That’s all I’m saying. Just to play it safe.”

“Yeah, you can do that,” Keith said, tapping Will on the shoulder. “Have you tried skipping instead of walking?”

“I could develop a lisp, I suppose,” Will said. “Maybe just throw a limp wrist around and flounce a bit.”

“Har dee har har,” Vinnie grumbled. “Just don’t get me fired.”



Keith had already been seated at the corner coffee shop for about twenty minutes when Will arrived. After a late night, Keith had invested in the espresso this morning for the extra kick. He was going over the sports scores in the paper.

“You don’t look like a baseball fan,” Will said, seating himself with an iced tea.

“It just passes the time. Mostly it’s so I can take some easy money off Steve and Quincy.” Steve and Quincy were two of “The Princes” who worked that same gate. “They bet with their heart. I just bet the odds.”

It was about thirty minutes before they were scheduled to report, so they were trying to take it easy in a desperate attempt to relax. Will grabbed a section of the newspaper and started flipping through it, as he fussed with his hair falling into his eyes.

Keith glanced over at his friend. “Hey uh, bud,” he said. “You still got some lipstick on from yesterday.”

“What?” Will said. He grabbed for his backpack, popped out a tiny mirror and checked his reflection. He had to pull his hair out of his eyes to get a look. Seeing the lipstick, he grabbed a napkin and tried to rub it off.

“They’re just going to put it back on again in a few minutes, don’t sweat it.”

“How long have I been wearing that around?” Will asked. “That’s embarrassing.”

“In southern California? Believe me, people around here wouldn’t even care. Do you, uh, always carry around a pocket mirror?”



“I guess,” Will said, putting it back. “You never know when it’ll come in handy.” Will was frustrated with his hair, and reached back in the pack for something else. He put a little red clip in his hair to keep it in place.

Keith was a little taken aback. “Is that a barrette?”

“It’s a clip.”

“Guys don’t wear clips.”

“Some do.”

“Who?”

Will paused. "Some," he tossed the paper on the table and then got up. "I think I better clock in early. I'll see you there," he sipped his tea and then was off.

"Well *excuuuse* me," Keith said to himself.



"Cutler."

Keith looked up from his bench to see Vinnie talking to him. The small man made a motion to come into his office. Keith did, and closed the door behind him. "You know this Will kid good enough, don't you?"

"Yeah, sure. He's a decent guy," Keith said, wondering what the secrecy was all about.

"Well, maybe you need to talk to him. When I made that fake entry into the personnel database to save your asses..."

"And yours," Keith added.

"Whatever. Point is, I think pretending to be a lady is getting to him."

The memory of the hair clip flashed through Keith's mind. "How do you mean?"

"He just changed into his costume. And I swear to God that he was wearing panties."

Keith turned his head around to look through the office window and across the room where their lockers were.

"Don't bother," Vinnie said. "He's not there now." He leaned back in his chair. "Look, legally, it's none of my business if he has some oddball sexual orientation. I mean, who gives a crap, really? But if he's gonna be trouble here in the men's lockers, or he's got some problem between the ears, I need to know."

"Why not ask him?"

"I'm asking *you*. Plus, he gives me the creeps."

"I'm not asking a dude about his underwear," Keith said, crossing his arms.

Vinnie whirled in his seat to face his computer. "Did you email me the days you wanted off for vacation next week?"

"Yeah."

Using a dramatic swing of his hand, Vinnie pressed the delete key on his keyboard. "Never got it."

"You can be so imperious, man," Keith said, leaving the office. "Totally imperious." He walked over to the makeup desk where Will was just getting his wig fixed up.