

Bilitis

We called our D&D group the Daughters of Bilitis, after the old lesbian activist group from the fifties. We were just a bunch of dykes sitting around a card table in Harley's basement, throwing dice.

And then Gene came out as a man. And all the fun was over.

Or so we thought.

Gene had been named after Gene Tierney, the actress. His family thought he would grow up to be a beautiful woman. Boy, were they wrong. Instead, he went on testosterone, and grew a beard. His voice lowered so many octaves he went from singing soprano to singing baritone. He was truly a self made man.

And we had no clue who he was anymore.

"I mean, he can't really be a daughter of Bilitis anymore, now can he?" Harley pointed out, while we talked it all over in her basement over bean dip and tortilla chips.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Lauren conceded, though you didn't really have to push her to exclude Gene.

"Now, look," I said, spreading my hands like I was giving a presidential speech. "Gene is a man. We've all accepted that. We still love him. He's not like a sister anymore, but he is like a brother. Why can't we, I dunno...move things around a little. Rename the group. Get rid of the Dykes Only motif."

The other girls looked at me like I'd just proposed murder. Though what I was proposing was equally heinous in their minds.

"But, Jackie," Kay said. "We've always been the Daughters of Bilitis! Just a bunch of dykes around a card table, remember?"

I sighed.

"Yeah, well, things change. Gene changed. And I'm sure his change has been harder than renaming the group would be. Don't y'all still like him?"

Halfhearted affirmatives went up around the room. It sounded like a flock of annoyed geese in there.

Lauren scooped up some bean dip with a chip, popped the chip into her mouth. Her crunching was deafening. She crossed her legs, and leaned back in her chair.

"Look, Jackie, we all love Gene, but...he's different now. That's his choice. Why should we change our group just for his choice? I respect it and all, but I'm not gonna upend my life for him."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was like I was in the Twilight Zone and someone had replaced my friends with evil doppelgängers. Were these really the women I had bonded with over four years?

"Hold up," I said slowly. "Upend? Choice? It's not 'upending your life' to fit Gene into our group. And what's that bullshit about 'choice'? Gene didn't choose to be trans, Lauren, anymore than you chose to be gay."

Her face reddened.

"Shut up, Jackie," she muttered.

I stood up, nearly knocking over the table with the bean dip.

"Now listen here. Do you remember how hard it was for each of us to come out? We did that in the nineties, man! AIDS! Gay panic! Republicans! Our parents treated us like we were such a

goddamned burden just for being who we are. Are we really gonna treat Gene the same way our parents treated us?"

They were silent for a while. Not even the sound of chips being chewed could be heard.

I sat back down, feeling hot under my flannel shirt. My feet ached. My head hurt. I needed a drink.

Harley cleared her throat.

"I propose a name change," she said, and her voice sounded like a thunder clap. "If I roll a 20 on a d20, we'll change our name."

She shook the die in her hand, then launched it. The die spun out on the table. The number 20 stuck up like a mountain peak, and did I hear angels singing?

"The die has decided," Harley said. She was solemn. "Our new name will be Dungeons and Dionysus."

I smiled. The others did, too.

"Good name," I said.

Harley grinned, and stuck her tongue out at me.

"Hey, thanks," she said, and grabbed a tortilla chip to scoop up some bean dip.

There was a knock at the top of the stairs.

"Who is it?" Lauren called.

Gene appeared, descending into our dungeon like a brave warrior of myth. Or maybe he was just a man, in a den of women, unafraid to be himself.

"Morgan let me in, Harley, I hope you don't mind," he said.

His deep voice still surprised me sometimes. But I would get used to it.

Harley shrugged. She went over and hugged him.

"Anything my wife does is okay by me," she said. "How you doing, young man?"

Gene chuckled.

"Harley, I'm twenty eight."

"Yeah, and the rest of us are in our thirties. So as far as I'm concerned, you're the baby of the group." She touched his arm. "The baby brother...of the group...."

She coughed, and went back to her chair.

"So, how's it going?" Gene wondered.

He looked at each of us in turn. Kay tried to smile at him. Lauren was afraid to meet his eyes. I grinned at him like a stupid school kid meeting a friend on the playground for the first time.

And in that moment, it was like I was seeing him for the first time. And I saw him for the man he was. He was a man who rolled some wicked dice. He was a man I'd been on dozens of fantasy campaigns with.

He was my friend.