

Out, Part 1: The Beginning

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Hiding years of neglect in 88% nylon/12% spandex...skirting the issue... evolution schmevolution...the strongest mirror in the whole wide world...

Louise was sick.

I wasn't too surprised. She hadn't been feeling well the last couple days, and fate being the tricky thing it is, the timing was correct. But, like I kept telling myself: if any of this was easy, it wouldn't be worth the trouble.

After the false alarm of two weeks previous, Friday 9/5/97 was to be my first night out with the Drag Outreach team from StopAIDS. Everything was just about ready: I'd scored on a none-too-shabby long green velvet dress from Ross Dress for Less (referred to in some circles as "Cross-dress For Less"), my hair was still a lovely shade of reddish purple, and we'd conducted a single though remarkably encouraging makeup experiment a couple weeks before in which apartment's mirrors remained uncracked and the clocks continued chugging right along, thank you very much. Faithful, almost daily attendance at the evil corporate gym I'd just joined (the one with Niki Taylor in the ads, if you wanna talk about unrealistic role models) combined with a healthier diet and more exercise in general over the last month or two brought my weight down to 230 from its peak (I think) of 250, not bad for starters. My gut was/is still noticeable, but not quite as much. They say the key to getting in shape is motivation, and doing full drag in public without wanting to look like Divine is one doozy of a motivator. Jaunts to Mervyn's for hose and Unusualia for a girdle helped pick up the slack, not to mention drive home just how much more work would be necessary.

Still, in my mind Louise was the most crucial element, being responsible for my makeup and hair (the hair, of course, had been colored a while back). She was quite ill and would've had every right to bail, but god bless her, she hung on. I'm just too damned lucky.

After work The Ex, Louise and I swung by Mervyn's to track down a decent pair of pantyhose (plus size 3, opaque black, not easy to find), then went home to chow down and get ready. Miraculously the nylons fit, a bit snug perhaps, but that's the whole damn point. Not seeing any point in taking them off only to repeat the laborious putting-on process when we got to StopAIDS, I kept them on, and at The Ex's suggestion I put on the long skirt I'd bought for \$4 a few days before at a thrift store to, as she said, "Get the feel for it." Fair enough. I kept it on for the trip out to the Castro; again, I didn't see the logic of taking off a skirt to put on pants which would in turn be replaced by a dress. If I was going to be doing full-blown drag later in the evening, why not a more casual form beforehand? It wasn't like I was afraid what anyone would think. That much was obvious.

We arrived at SA at 8pm and Louise got right to work on my makeup. Now, the last and only other time Louise made me up, there were a few advantages, the most obvious being it was in our apartment and therefore a relatively controlled environment. (When I say "our" apartment, I mean The Ex and I. Louise doesn't live with us, she's just over a lot.) There were no particular time concerns, she had a certain freedom to experiment, and perhaps most importantly we had a healthy supply of grass. Louise requested that I smoke a bowl to relax, since I'm inherently tense and jumpy. I was nicely baked while she made me up--a lovely experience all around.

Tonight, though, we were at SA's headquarters; Louise had to perform a miracle in an hour (according to biblical myth it took a supposedly all-powerful superbeing six days to create the world--you do the math), balancing my desire to look as feminine as possible with the reality that regardless of streetlights it'd

still be somewhat dark and therefore subtlety wouldn't do the trick. I have *nothing* against flamers, I love 'em all, but it's not me...I just wanna be Elizabeth Hurley, is that so much to ask? Anyway, I'd also signed a contract stating that I'd be completely sober during any SA activity, which meant no grass. No problem there, actually, since I wanted to be as aware and in control as possible.

I'll admit, I was surprised by just how calm and relaxed I was during the makeup process, despite what should have been a state of extreme mortal terror. Hell, for the whole evening I wasn't anywhere near as nervous as I'd originally anticipated (which is a good thing), but particularly while I was being made up. Holding my eyes still for the application of eyeliner and mascara isn't exactly something I've had a lot of practice at, either.

Y'know, I severely hate to use this word because of how much homophobia and gay-bashing it's been used to justify, but let's face it, the application of eye makeup is unnatural. I don't give a shit if you're male or female or somewhere in between--eyelids, lashes and the blinking motion at least partially evolved to protect the eyes from the kind of intrusion presented by that damn pencil. Beauty is all about defeating evolution. Maybe that explains why creationists like Tammy Faye Bakker wear so much fucking makeup. But I digress. (And the less I think about Tammy Faye as related to the concept of "beauty" the better, 'cause associating the two depresses me in ways I can't begin to express.)

The solution to the darkness issue? A word which chilled me to the bone: glitter. Gold glitter, that is, as it'd been determined that gold is a color which would work well on me. Around the eyes. Fine. A bit more flaming that I'd had in mind, but fine. Beggars and choosers and all that, and there was no denying the fact that Louise knew exactly what she was doing. (She's done drag makeup before.) The stuff was much heavier than I anticipated, though. La de da.

When I was as made up as I was gonna get, I went into the bathroom to change—to take off the skirt and put on the dress, essentially, taking care not to damage the makeup. I was already wearing the hose, so next on was the girdle. The two combined really did make a difference; not a huge one, but it was obvious where the undergarments ended and I began. The one missing item, which some might think to be the most obvious, was a bra. As it happened, between the cut of the dress and the fact that I kinda have breasts to start with it was unnecessary to wear a bra simply to stuff it. At least, it would be okay for the evening. I didn't have a particularly feminine shape, but my primary goal was more not to look like I was pregnant. (Still a long way to go, indeed.) Though I didn't have any women's shoes, Louise had thankfully talked me into digging out the shoes I wore during my awful time working at The Good Guys!, given their fascist anti-tennis shoe policy. They were remarkably comfy with the nylons, and looked worlds better in this context than my Asics. I emerged from the bathroom in full regalia to no particular fanfare or attention. Understandable. To the others present I was just another queen, and not a particularly special one at that. A first-timer, yes, but everyone's been a first-timer.

Still, there was that all-important first moment of looking at myself in a long mirror. Well, there I was. I'd been wanting to do this for a long, long time, and now I was doing it. This was about as real as it could get. None of this closeted, "I'm a pillar of the community and I can't ever let anyone know I have these shameful unnatural desires" heavy Christian guilt bullshit. Nope, I was about to go onto a busy street in full drag and talk to people about their sexual habits. And if you're a drag queen in the Castro (which isn't as common a sight as you out-of-towners might think), there's about a 99.9% likelihood that people are going to assume you're gay. Hell, if you're walking down the street in jeans and a t-shirt, it's 99.8%--and I couldn't care less either way.

The reflection was still me. Me on a different level, but still me. Perhaps only the name was changed: Sherilyn Sarandon Manson Buffalo Springfield. (Fenn,

Susan, Shirley and a horribly forced Neil reference.) Or maybe that'd been the name all along and I just finally began to fit it. Who the fuck knows?

The moment arrived: it was time to go out.

Coming up: *What the hell is Drag Outreach, anyway?...straight into it... the apple-lined portrait...Pepper's boots...scrutiny...an audience with the Sister...the gum that tastes like rubber...Harvey's, the Midnight Sun and Neve's hair...and more...maybe...*



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