

FEATHERS
by Stephen Gnojewski

Cast of Characters

PIA ENNUI, an aging drag queen in her late 30's

JUJJ, a glam queen in her early 20's

Setting

A nightclub dressing room

Time

Now

SETTING: A makeshift dressing room in a cramped storage closet of Feathers—a gay nightclub in Northern New Jersey. An ‘extravaganza eleganza’ of colorful feather boas and sequined gowns adorn the back wall. Beer and liquor boxes are stacked haphazardly in the corners and on shelving units. The faint thump-thump of electronic dance music can be heard in the background.

AT RISE: PIA ENNUI, an aging drag queen in her late 30’s, sits before a mirror, framed with light bulbs. An open drag-bag of makeup spills out on to the dressing table before her. She is meticulous with a disciplined reason and order to her actions. After a moment, JUJJ, a glam queen in her early 20’s, enters with a cocktail in hand and attitude to spare.

JUJJ

(Sipping her cocktail.) You would think after a sickening performance like that, that Vinny could see clear to putting a little gin in my martini. I mean, if I wanted a glass of water, I would have ordered Perrier.

(PIA ignores JUJJ with a labored roll of her eyes and removes her jewelry and earrings.)

And what dark drama’s brewing over there, squirreelfriend? You’ve been casting shade all night?

(Stoic, PIA does not respond. JUJJ makes her way over to her makeup station to count out her measly tips.)

Fine. Have it your way. But just so you know, I didn’t intentionally miss my cue if that’s what’s got you all hot and bothered. Been a little distracted lately.

PIA

(Softly and a bit too sweet.) Jujj?

JUJJ

Yes, hunty?

PIA

Be a dear and do me a favor.

JUJJ

(Cautiously.) Anything.

PIA

(As a threat.) The next time you try to push me down a staircase, better make sure you break both my legs.

(Instead of responding defensively, JUJJ applauds PIA's reference rather than antagonize her any further.)

JUJJ

Oh, no you done didn't. Look at you, Miss Thang, serving up some 'Showgirls' realness.

PIA

(Pointedly with her fingernails or maybe a makeup brush.) I ain't serving nothing but a stern, cold warning. Don't you ever sabotage me on stage like that again. (With total sincerity.) Pia Ennui is a professional performer; not no *damn* comedienne. I don't improvise.

(PIA returns her attention to the mirror and removes her make up.)

Been performing this routine since you were just a twink in the woods, and I am not about to go and change things up for some inexperienced ingénue who doesn't know her ass from a hole in the ground.

JUJJ

Eat me. Are you blind or don't you even bother to notice the audience anymore? They were gagging. Gagging! Instead of sticking to your tired routine, maybe you should try and spice things up a bit more—add a new number, a new outfit, a new—

PIA

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

JUJJ

Bitch, please, your act is so tired it's practically narcoleptic. Having to vamp for a few moments on stage was probably the most genuine thing to happen to you in a long time.

PIA

I've had about enough of your reading.

JUJJ

Well, keep on pouting, and you might just get yourself a new set of wrinkles.

PIA

The library is closed. Officially! I will not have you watermelon your way through another performance. Stick to the script next time!

JUJJ

(Under her breath) And who said anything about a next time?

PIA

What was that?

JUJJ

I said, FOR THOSE OF US HARD OF HEARING, who-said-anything-about-a-next-time?

PIA

(Slamming closed her makeup kit) Why you two-timing Jezebel! You went off and got yourself another gig didn't you? Where? In the City? How much are they paying you? How much?

JUJJ

Chill your grill, gurl. (Trying to change the subject.) You're sure you don't want a cocktail or something?

PIA

I want the T. And as your drag mother, I deserve it. Who took you under her wing? Who taught you the tricks of the trade? Show me a little respect, God damn it.

JUJJ

(Imitating Faye Dunaway.) "Why can't you treat me like I would be treated by any stranger on the street?"

PIA

Can the camp. What's going on with you?

(Pause.)

JUJJ

I suppose my timing really is off. (JUJJ folds her money—which isn't much—and tucks it away in her purse.) Look...I just want out, okay. That's all. No hard feelings.

PIA

Out? Out of what?

JUJJ

Out of this... (Indicating the wigs and makeup and costumes) I feel trapped—caged in by all this...pretending. And I just can't do it anymore.

(PIA removes her wig—a gesture that seems to usher in a sense of poignancy.)

PIA

You know, it takes real balls to wear a dress. Did someone get to you? Bully you? ‘Cause let me tell you, honey, there ain’t no armor, ever, stronger than drag.

(Suddenly overcome with emotion, JUJJ stumbles for a comeback.)

PIA

Oh, sweetie. What is it? You can tell me.

(JUJJ just shakes her head unable to speak. PIA moves over to comfort her.)

Look, whatever it is, know that it will get better. I promise. (Pause.) Now, this may sound a little crazy, but as Pia...it’s as though I can get away with saying and doing things that...that I just wouldn’t have the guts to do or say as myself. It’s as if Pia is somehow smarter than I am, stronger...and all the insults and attacks...they don’t amount to anything anymore. They just bounce right off and disappear...right into thin air. And that, that, my darling, that is the real magic, the crazy, topsy-turvy art of the illusion...the escape.

(PIA stands behind JUJJ with her hands on her shoulders. They both gaze at each other’s reflection in the mirror.)

Just look at you. You are stunning, both inside and out, as a man and as a woman. As Jujj, you have the power to transform, to transcend any shitty situation or fucked-up cage someone tries to keep you in...with her wings you can fly right on out of here, above any insult or obstacle there is.

JUJJ

(Meekly.) But I don’t want to be both. I don’t want to change.

(JUJJ turns so that she is facing PIA.)

(Softly begging.) I want to be a woman. Always.

PIA

(Somewhat taken by surprise.) Oh?

JUJJ

I’ve made an appointment—next Tuesday—to see a therapist. To talk about the steps, the...the challenges...of transitioning.

(Uncharacteristically at a loss for words, PIA retreats back to hear mirror in silence.)

JUJJ

Look, this isn't how I had rehearsed this. Somehow I thought I would be more prepared. I guess...I guess I've just been trying to avoid upsetting everything. (Sigh of frustration.) Jesus Christ, it's like I'm coming out all over again. But I am so fucking tired, you know? Of holding back, of hiding for fear of...of what? Offending someone? I have to do this. Before I end up regretting one more moment as myself.

(JUJJ makes her way over to PIA)

You know, a super fierce queen once told me, 'you change every situation by your perception of it and how you choose to see it.'

(JUJJ stands behind PIA with her hands on her shoulders. They both gaze at each other's reflection in the mirror.)

Well, I choose to see a real woman. Without the exaggeration, the satire...

PIA

(Removing her eyelashes.) You know, maybe you are right. Maybe it is time for a change.

JUJJ

Maybe this is just some blessing in disguise.

(JUJJ hugs PIA tightly. A long pause.)

PIA

Mama, could use that drink right about now.

JUJJ

One watered-down martini coming right up.

(JUJJ starts to exit the dressing room.)

PIA

Oh, and Jujj...

JUJJ

Yes, hunty?

(JUJJ hovers near the exit in anticipation of some insightful comment.)

PIA

Better make it a double.

(JUJJ smiles and then exits. Alone, PIA gazes at her reflection in the mirror only a bit differently than at the beginning. Slowly, methodically, she undresses and changes into her street clothes—transforming back into a man. The faint thump-thump of dance music can still be heard in the background. Exiting, PIA catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror. There is a sincere moment of questioning, uncertainty. Finally, PIA stands up straight and proud. Lights fade.

END OF PLAY