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| Rescuing Roberta  A Very Short Story  By Maryanne Peters  I will admit it, Robert Kradel Junior was a prick, back when he had a prick. But he did not deserve what he got.  Jose Berganza had reason to dislike his boss, but what he did was way beyond that. It became clear to me that there was real hatred on display. Venal, viscious hatred to warrant this level of degradation.  Robert had taken advantage of Jose and his talent, holding over him the fact that he was only a phone call away from deportation.  “Who needs another Mexican fag in our wonderful country,” he would say. But we never knew that in speaking that way Robert was hiding his own little secret. Robert Kradel Junior was a closet transvestite.  When Jose found out it was as if his dreams had come true. He snapped the photo that you have seen, with Robert in all his lacy finery, his shaved legs in white stockings, white stilletto heels, a blond wig on his head and a face caked in makeup. |  |

But nobody except Jose had the photo then. It gave him the power he needed. Robert was not ready for the world to meet his feminine side. Not then anyway. So Jose could compel him to do almost anything. But keeping his job and getting a raise was not enough. He wanted everything, or at least half of it. And he wanted to make sure that he could stay in the States.

Marrying Robert would provide that path to citizenship that Jose wanted. It was the outfit in the photo that gave Jose the idea. The maleness so wonderfully concealed in that image would not be an issue. A foreign born spouse of a gay couple is recognized, or was then. It was just that Jose wanted Joseph to be his transvestite bride. I suppose that it was all about demeaning the man who had once demeaned him, but that now seems venal and petty.

I was invited to the wedding, along with others who worked for Robert, no doubt so they could share the joke. It seemed to me that the room was full of his enemies. Is it right that a bride should be in a room full of people who hated her on her wedding day?

I should have been one of them. I did not work for him but God knows that man made my life a misery. I paid for a space on the bride’s dance card. Plenty of them wanted to get up close to Robert – close enough to spit in his face. But that was not the way things were for me.

It was slow dance. I pulled him close. I had my hand on his ass, burried in the ruffles of that ridiculous wedding dress. People who looked on could see, and they laughed.

“Doc, I’m desperate,” he whispered. “There is nothing left of me, and still Jose wants every last drop of me. I am married to him now, but I need a way out. I have done not just bad things in my life. You know that. Please help me.”

A few good things, maybe. So I told him: “Well, you cannot go back to being you, that is for sure.”

“How could I,” he said. “Look at me.”

I have to say, that in that moment I looked at him and I did not see Robert at all, but only the new Roberta. It was a wig on his head, with the flowers and ribbons in it, and the heavy makeup, but there was a real femininity in his eyes. Those eyes spoke of vulnerability. There was nothing of Robert Kradel Junior left.

“I can get you some tablets,” I told him. “Tablets that will ultimately make you unattractive to Jose. He is gay after all. He may like his men femmy, but I suspect not fishy. If he abandons you then come to me.”

Those were my parting words: “Come to me”. I might tell myself that I was just offering him a port in a storm, but the truth is that even in that short and somewhat awkward embrace I had learned that Robert had ceased and Roberta had come into being. But I did not stay until the end of the reception. I had seen the humanity in Roberta and could not stay on to watch her further humiliation.

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|  | I dispatched the pills, and several repeats, and like everybody else, it seems, I saw nothing of either Robert or Roberta for over a year. Then I checked my online diary and found that I had an afternnon appointment with Mrs. Roberta Berganza.  When she walked in, I immediately thought how stupid it was to think that this could be the pathetic creature I had danced with a year before. The woman was tall and attractive, with honey blonde hair that was clearly her own, and a stunning body clothed in the skimpiest little black dress.  She waltzed in and put an empty jar on the table – one of the several jars of blockers and hormones that I had sent to Robert Kradel Junior to help him escape an unwanted marriage.  “You were right,” she said, her voice high and clear, but with the barest trace of the voice I knew. “He hates my breasts.”  “Of course he does,” I said. “He is gay. But what do you think of them?” |

“I love them,” she said. “They make me feel … right, somehow. But what do you think of them?”

“Well, I am a doctor,” I explained. I thought they were wonderful, but I gave a professinal opinion: “I think that they are surprisingly advanced if they are only from hormones.”

“They are,” she said. “But I understand that a girl like me can expect breasts a size one or two sizes smaller than my mother’s, and she had very big breasts.”

“Well, congratulations,” I said. “But are you here seeking my professional assitance.”

“Yes,” she said. “The next thing I want is to have bottom surgery. To get rid of these awful dangly bits and get myself a neat and tidy front for summer.”

“If Jose is no longer interested in you, then why would you bother?” I asked.

“Well, now that he has moved on, back to his drag queens, I have been considering my future, and I have decided that it should be as Roberta. And I have decided that Roberta should share her life with somebody that she respects and admires.

“Do you have anybody specific in mind?”, I asked.

“Yes,” she said, smiling sweetly at me. “Yes I do.”

The End

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