Call for Help

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I could hear the distress in her voice, my little Hannah: “Help Daddy. Mommy is really sick. Please come.” A heart-rending call for help.

“I can’t do that sweetie,” I explained. “Daddy is not allowed to be with you without the special ‘yes’ that I told you about, remember?”

“Please Daddy, please,” she said. I could hear Melody crying in the background. The sound of both of my children in distress was too hard to stand. What father could refuse to act, even in the face of the Court order.

Barely thinking about I found myself running down the stairs and out the door, my cell at my ear.

“She is really cold Daddy,” said Hannah.

“You find some blankets, Honey,” I said. “Tuck her up snugly and I will be there soon. I am going to hang up the phone now, but you be ready to open the door when I get there …”.

It was seven blocks, but it seemed to take an age to run it. I found myself cursing Erin under my breath. I passed the street where I knew was the 300 yard mark. I was now in breach of the order, but I had to get there.

Hannah was looking out the window. Her sweet sad face made my heart melt. She buzzed me in (she could barely reach the button) and opened the door for me.

I could see immediately that Erin was dead. My once pretty and happy wife was now wizened and cold, but the features that had attracted me to her were still visible. The curse of heroin had robbed her of everything else.

She told me that she had kicked it. I had. It had been hard, but in truth it had been easier without her. We always seemed to trip one another up when we were together. She had been able to persuade everybody that it was my fault, that she was the innocent, that she was the better parent. Now she lay there dead, with fresh tracks on her arm, and I was clean.

She was covered with a blanket with only her face visible. Melody was holding her cold hand, with a look of heart-rending concern.

Something made me sit down beside Erin’s body and pull it to me. I had loved this woman once, and now that she was dead she could not hate me. I could hold her.

There was something black oozing from her lifeless mouth. I wiped it with my T-shirt.

“When is she going to wake up, Daddy?” Melody asked plaintively.

“I don’t think that she is going to wake up, sweetie,” I said. “Mommy is going to sleep forever. We are going to have to find a way to live without her.”

Hannah put her arms around me. Melody let go of her mother’s hand and came over to hug me as well. It was a sad but beautiful moment. I knew then that we must never be apart again.

But there was a problem. In fact, more than one.

For reasons that I will never understand, Erin had taken out a restraining order against me. I admit that it made me angry, so I had breached it a couple of times, and I was on “watch”. I was not supposed to be anyway near where I was.

The result was that Erin had sole custody and I had only supervised visitation rights. Of course I could seek custody, but I knew her parents would oppose anything I did. They hated me and would do anything to keep me from my kids. And they might succeed, what with me having no job or stable living arrangements. I was basically couch surfing and had been for close to a year.

Then there was the welfare check. She had income and I had nothing. My only hope of income was the comics that I had been working on for years, but nothing major expected anytime soon.

And then there was Erin’s body. What would the police say? Sure it was an overdose, but I was there, and she had accused me before of being her supplier. The police knew that our relationship had broken down, so might they suspect that I had killed her with a deliberate OD?

There was her blood or bile on my T-shirt. I took it off. I looked for something to put on and just grabbed her silk kimono hanging nearby and slipped it on.

“So, are you going to be Mommy now?” asked Hannah. It was so sweet that I found myself smiling. I needed to be her with my kids. If only I could just slip into her shoes. She was the approved parent. With all the lies she had told amount me, I was a monster, denied even supervised visitation. If I could just take over, nobody would even notice if I disappeared.

If only.

Was it such a crazy idea? I was no tranny, but I had done drag a couple of times for Halloween and fancy dress. I had the advantage of being slight in build, no bigger than Erin. Her clothes would fit me. Even her shoes. But pass as female?

Then, if I could, could I pass as her? Who knew her?

“Hannah, honey, who visits Mommy?” I asked.

“Just Mrs. Plummer from the Welfare Office,” said Hannah. “I don’t like her. She is very mean to us. And her friend Jake comes sometimes.”

Jake. That would be Jake Hearst. That is where the drugs came from. I found her phone and scrolled through looking for calls. There were texts to him and from him. The last one from her just read: “I need”, and his reply was: “Coming over fully loaded”. Only yesterday.

I texted him: “I am not doing this anymore. I need to be clean for the girls. Do not come again or call me ever”.

I checked her emails. There was a message from the Welfare Office about a home inspection on the evening of the 16th. Fuck, that was only 2 days away. It was not signed off as anybody Plummer, but rather the local supervisor.

I replied: “I would like to delay this visit, and because of her behavior towards my children I will not permit Plummer to enter our home”. Cross my fingers and hope that they will send a stranger. It will need more than crossed fingers. If the person they send knows Erin I am sunk. If they do not know her then I will have to pass myself off as her.

“Who else comes around, Hannah? Who else does Mommy know?”

“You know her Daddy. She won’t let anyone in the house. Mrs. Greene used to baby sit but she doesn’t live here anymore. We liked Mrs. Greene.”

“We need to get you both to school,” I said. “Does Mommy take you?”

“Sometimes,” said Hannah. “But we can walk by ourselves.”

“Get yourselves ready,” I said. “I am going to be Mommy now. When you are ready you will need to say your final goodbyes to your old Mommy. And then we are not going to say anything about this to anybody. Do you understand? If you want me to stay and be your new Mommy, nobody knows. OK?”

“But I know what’s happening Daddy. Mommy’s dead,” she said. There was a small tear in her eye, which I matched with my own. What father cannot feel their own child’s sadness?

“We can be sad at home, Honey,” I told her. “Just the three of us – we can cry together. But the only way that I can be here is if both you and Melody keep it a secret. OK?”

She nodded. The truth is that Hannah had been forced to be responsible too early, because her mother was such a mess. Of course, she knew what was happening. She was forced to be aware well in advance of her age. I knew that I could count on her. She would talk it over with Melody. This could work. I would just need to keep my appearances in public to a minimum. And I would need to make sure that my first appearance was a winner.

For that I needed help, and I thought that I knew who to call.

I was a drug addict. So was my wife Erin. It is a dark place, but you need not be alone. Drug addicts have no friends. Everybody is expendable when you need what you need. But you need friends to climb out of there. I had three, and I am not including Erin.

Dolores (Dolly) had trained as a hairdresser, so she had a good job, but she needed to work as a prostitute to earn the money for drugs. In her day job, I would never have known that she was not a real woman, except for learning her limitations as a sex worker.

I was stronger than Dolly, and Zack, and Bertus, in leading us out of that place. We had a “call for help” pact. Zack and Bertus had called me once each, Dolly had called me three times. She owed me, maybe she even owed me her life, and she knew it.

“It’s early so I can pass on my bookings,” she said. “I can be there in five, but only for a couple of hours.”

I got the girls ready for school. Melody said that if they were down on the street 15 minutes before the school bell, they could walk with Mrs. Delaney and her kids.

They were barely out of the house when Dolly rang the doorbell. I had time to hide Erin’s body. It was so small and thin that it folded into a large suitcase.

Dolly looked great. She was clean. She was looking me up and down.

“You could pull off the look,” she said. “But voice and movement will take time. Weeks if not months.”

“I don’t have that,” I said. “I need to leave the apartment, but I cannot be seen here. Unless you have a better idea, I need a good disguise. I need to go out as Erin.”

“I don’t even have a wig,” she said. “I would have to work a miracle with what you have there, even though it is long enough to work with. You had better show me what Erin has.”

She did not ask where she was. As I said, she owed me. She knew that she needed no explanation as to why I was alone in my estranged wife’s apartment, so why even ask?

“We are in luck,” she said. “No wig, but this is a hairpiece to add volume, and in her hair color, and there is plenty of that in her cabinet. And there are other good quality products. And we have curlers and pins. Yes, as I said, I can pull off the look, But, you have about 90 minutes to learn to act female, something that has taken me half a lifetime. Hmm.”

“Where do I start?” I asked.

“Run a bath,” she said. “We need a total shave down. And I need a plastic basin to do your hair.

I followed instructions. Dolly knew what to do. She focused on my face and my hair, plucking and plastering, washing and blow-drying. And all the time she did this she had me yodeling and doing other vocal exercises to lift the tone of my voice.

“Good hair and good skin will go a long way,” she said. “And when you open your mouth, we need a woman’s voice to come out, but movement will be your biggest problem. You walk and move your arms like a man, but if I tell you not to do that you will look like a drag artist. It has to be very subtle. I meant it when I said it took me years. We just need to follow some simple rules for the time being. Avoid walking. We will use props to keep your hands in use. We can figure this out if we are talking about a limited exercise.”

“To be honest, I don’t know how long I will need to do this,” I told her. “Maybe after a while I can just come forward and tell them that I have been looking after them while Erin is on a bender. It would have to be long enough to prove that I am a good parent.”

“There you are,” said Dolly. “Have a look in the mirror.”

I moved to the bedroom to have a look and when I saw the reflection in the mirror, I could not believe that it was me. Dolly had me dressed down in a fairly plain dress, but beneath it there was a garment that she had brought with her to give me shape. The freshly shaven legs looked great, and the almost flat shoes were practical, but it was above the shoulders that she had really worked her miracle. The hairpiece was for Erin to glam up, but Dolly had had cut and curled it to add feminine volume at the back, while blow-drying my own longish hair to have volume in front. There was a side parting and a colorful barrette, but the hair was off my face showing beautifully shaped eyebrows, just a hint of eyeliner and mascara, and neutral lipstick. It was so understated, that it was totally convincing. But what was so totally unexpected was just how pretty I was. Really pretty. Embarrassingly so. Better looking than Dolly. Better looking than Erin.

“I, … I,” I stammered. “Thank you. Great job, thank you.”

“Voice,” she snapped.

“Thank you,” I said it again, the right way, adding: “You’re a sweetheart.” But I could not take my eyes of the woman in the mirror.

“Look after that do,” said Dolly. “If it comes astray you will need to come to the salon to have proper extensions, and they will be expensive. If its long term that’s what you need, and something more lasting on getting rid of that beard. Until then it’s the closest shave you can get, plenty of this concealer, and then this skin tone. And that won’t last a full day.”

I was still admiring myself when she left to get on with her work.

But I had work to do too.

My daughters had a key to the apartment and let themselves in after school. I was in wearing a large apron and rubber gloves as I was in the bedroom wiping down with bleach Erin’s body and the suitcase containing it. When I heard them come in I closed everything up so that I could greet them in the living room.

“Hi girls,” I said, in my best effort at my new voice.

They both stood staring for a moment. I took of the gloves then the apron being careful not to disarrange my hair and struck a little pose to show the new me. Hannah just rushed at me to hold me, followed quickly by Melody.

“Mommy, Mommy,” said Melody.

“You’re going to be the best Mom,” said Hannah. It hurt a little that what she was saying was that I could be a better mom than Erin, but I wanted that to be true. That aside, it was a moment of true family bliss, the feeling only a parent can understand. Before I knew it, we were all sobbing with happiness.

I had dinner on. Soon after Dolly had left, I made my first venture out. I just needed to go to the deli around the corner. I had a bag over my shoulder to put both of my hands on the straps as Dolly suggested. Rather than walk I did an almost skipping, almost running, bustle, that would be less noticeable.

“You’re new,” the young man behind the counter said.

“Just covering for my sister,” I explained, in my best voice. I realized that it might be a good idea to be seen and known should anybody ask about me, so I swapped some small talk as I ordered some meat, fresh pasta, sauce herbs and vegetables. Things went well. I was able to hurry home and get a meal on.

I wanted it to be good. I wanted my kids to have a good quality home-cooked meal. God knows what they had been eating if their mother was strung out.

As it happened, they loved the meal. And afterwards, rather than watch TV we looked through some old photos and the like and talked about their mother. We all cried a little. It is funny how wearing a dress makes it so much easier to cry, but I was glad that I could. I held them close, one on either side of me, just three sad females. It was an experience that I will always treasure. It was … transformative.

More importantly, we were a family. Me, and my two daughters. A solo mother on welfare, with her two daughters. We could pull this off. I had one more day, then the following morning I would have a home inspection. I knew what to expect, as Erin had told me about one before: The inspector would call in the morning before the kids went to school to ensure that they were up and fed and ready for their day. I would be ready.

I decided that part time work might help. I could put in some hours without losing welfare benefits, and it would look good. I would ring another of my “call for help” pact, Zack Barrett, who was back at work running a machine shop nearby. He was always complaining that he was buried in paperwork.

“So, let me get this straight,” he said over the phone, “You are not looking to get paid, just have a job for a bit, and you want to do it in drag.”

“Not in drag,” I corrected. “I am living with my kids now as their mother. It’s a long story, but she is not around at the moment, and I am filling her place.”

“To be honest, pal, if you can help tidy up our shit, I’ll be happy to pay you, over the counter or under,” he said. “You’re hired.”

“Text that to me at the number I will give you,” I said. “And while I am in her place, call me Erin.”

“OK Erin,” he said. “Can you start today?”

So, I got dressed and went around to his workshop. My hair was still holding together and after shaving and applying the concealer, I did my best with some makeup. I decided that it would be messy, so I wore a pair of Erin’s skinny jeans, which I filled out much better than she did with her scrawny frame. I put on a brightly floral top over a filled bra. With just a morning’s instruction from Dolly I thought I had picked the best piece in the wardrobe. It did not accentuate my shoulders and was long enough to conceal and over large camel toe when I walked. Now that walk was a little less hurried and more confident. ‘Keep it free and natural’, I told myself.

Zack could not believe it was me.

“I had no idea you were transgender,” he said. It seemed like the easiest explanation. It was certainly better than to say that my ex-wife’s body was stuffed in a suitcase and I was filling her shoes to keep the welfare check coming.

Zack’s office was a mess. It was as if any piece of paper was just thrown in, and nobody actually seemed to work in there. Bills got paid when creditors followed up, but invoicing was COD and not in order, and following up debtors seemed to be not happening at all. I spent that day just getting it organized, but by the time I was due at the salon, I told Zack that I expected to bring in a lot of money, just from debtors and invoicing uncollected goods and work in progress.

I had put in four hours so I welcomed the chair at the salon. Despite the strange smells and goings on, I think that I was learning to understand what a haven this could be.

Dolly had lined up hair extensions. I thought that she was going to run with a wig, but she said that my hair had looked so good the day before that extensions would be better. But she did warn me: “You will have hair that you will need to look after, but it will look great.” She gave me instructions and I was ready. I went home with it in a sort of bonnet and enjoyed a long shower.

I embraced the girls when they got home, and asked: “What do you think?”

“Oh Mommy, its so pretty”, said Melody. “We can braid it for you. We can do lots of styles. We did it for Mom … for the other Mommy … you know … we did it for her when she couldn’t. When her hands were shaky. And her makeup too. We are really good at hairstyles and makeup. Oh Mommy, we are going to have so much fun.”

I almost burst into tears of joy. All of my dreams seemed to have come true. I was with my children. I was sad to have lost Erin, but the truth is that she had been the problem for so long, and now we were (not to sound too cold) better off without her.

I let the girls brush my hair that night. We played around a little, but I wanted to make sure that all the bonding held firm. Tomorrow morning was going to be a key test.

And when we rose in the morning, I was ready for a few surprises.

The first one was the happy surprise that the inspector had never met Erin and accepted me as her. This I had hoped for by disqualifying the regular visitor, but happily there was no photo of Erin on the papers, just photos of Hannah and Melody.

The second surprise was that I was so successful in passing myself off as a woman, that I became aware that the inspector was attracted to me!

His name was Grayson Boult, but he said: “Call me Gray.” He was a little older than me. Early thirties I guess. He came from a mining town in Pennsylvania and had gone down the mines when he finished high school, but he wanted something more. He went to night school and Community College and graduated with a degree in social work. He loved kids and wanted to help disadvantaged families. He said that he wasn’t a talker, but he seemed to want to tell me everything about himself. I let him because I was still uncertain about my own voice. I said as little as possible. Just lots of smiles.

I made him coffee and fed him cookies.

“Did you make these?” he asked.

I just smiled as if I had. He needed to think that I was the best mother in town. I think that I left him with a good impression.

Still, I had a plan in my head that required me to move out of the city. I figured that if I was to get back to being a real father, and not just a father pretending to be a mother, it needed to be somewhere else. But I still depended on the welfare payments, and they were local.

“I can help you with a transfer if that is what you want,” said Gray, with what sounded like a hint of disappointment. “But your girls are settled in school, and I am sure they are your priority. And now you have a job, which I will check up on tomorrow. It looks good for you here. And I am her to help you … I mean, the Department is here to support you … and your family.”

I gave him my sweetest thank-you smile. He just looked at me. It was kind of weird.

I turned up for work the following day, and things became even weirder. If Zack had been surprised to see me dressed as a woman on my first day, he was staggered that I should reappear on my second day at work looking the way I did.

“You could be a model,” he said. “You’d better stay off the workshop floor. You will drive my workers crazy, looking as good as you do.”

And he was right. First the social worker and now these guys.

That night I borrowed the workshop van so that I could dispose of Erin’s body. I had some scrap metal from the workshop to weight the suitcase and I knew the isolated bridge where I could ditch it. I needed to drive for miles that night. Then I needed to load the weights inside the suitcase while on the bridge, as it would have been too heavy to manhandle otherwise. Luckily it was a very quiet night, and nobody saw me.

As I watched the bubbles, I found myself wondering how life would have been if things had been different. Maybe if Erin had never met me, her life could have been happy. Maybe if she had met somebody like Grayson Boult, who wanted to do good in the world, she would have led a rewarding life of contentment, surrounded by children. It could have been a wonderful life. Wonderful.

I was just worried about leaving my girls alone. I hurried back but it was almost morning by the time my van pulled up outside our place.

Grayson came around a few days later with papers to transfer welfare out of state. This time I had baked my own cookies. I just followed a recipe, but they turned out really well. He loved them.

“Look, this is breaking all the rules, but before you consider moving, I wonder if you might consider going out to dinner with me? After you have moved then I will have no conflicts to deal with, so … what do you say?”

What could I say? I think of a whole host of things now, like “I don’t think it would be appropriate” or “I’m not looking for any attachments in my life right now”. That would work. But instead a little girly voice came out and said: “Oh, that sounds fantastic, I would love to.”

Fantastic? As in – a fantasy. Fantastic.

Well, it was. He picked me up a couple of nights later. He had even arranged a sitter for the girls. I wore a little black dress over a body shaper that Dolly had provided, with gel inserts that wobbled just like real breasts. She helped me with evening “smoky eye” makeup and dramatic lipstick. I got myself ready way too soon and ended up clip-clopping around the apartment in my heels until the bell rang.

I don’t think that there is anything quite so satisfying as taking a man’s breath away with that first look at you. It is like a compliment on a masterpiece that you have created, but where you are both the creator and the masterpiece. And in his eyes, you see the power that you have. The power to move a heart. And that was not the only part of his anatomy that I moved. But I was not thinking about that then. I am not sure what I was thinking but it was not that.

“Wow,” he said.

I offered him a soft freshly manicured hand, to lead me to his car, and to an evening of bliss.

Of course, the problem is that fantasies are make believe, and this was too. The reality was filthy. This goddess that he was admiring was a man in disguise. A previous drug addict. A man who had disposed of his wife’s body so that he could take her place and appropriate her welfare payments. A villain, but with a noble motive – my children.

But as I sat there, playing with my hair, and laughing at his jokes, and hanging on his every word, these thoughts were miles away. In fact, it was not until he drove me back to my block and kissed me on my doorstep, with his tongue in my mouth, and his hand fondling my silicone… - But not even then. At that moment my stomach was not turning at the thought of kissing another man. My only thought was that I wished that breast was real so that I could have felt that caress.

How is this possible? Can a man become so completely absorbed by his disguise that even his own sexuality is changed? When I was back inside and the babysitter had left with him, I feverishly stripped everything off and stood in front of the mirror. There I was, the slim, pale, hairless body, with no breasts, and a penis that seemed so much smaller than it ever had been – almost as if it was responding to the change in me by shriveling away to nothing. I could now look at myself and ask: “What are your feelings towards Grayson Boult?”

My hair was still feminine. Even with all the makeup gone, my face did not look masculine. The eyes were big and … full of tears. In that moment I knew that I was falling in love with Grayson Boult. Whatever I had been before that moment, what I ever I was now, I knew that I wanted to be a wife to Grayson Boult.

I woke up early, the day after that date. I surprised myself by sleeping soundly, but it felt as all the emotions that I had gone through that night, when I was with him and when I got home and I was alone, had sapped me to exhaustion.

I awoke at the first light of dawn and everything was as it had been. I felt my chin. I was a man. I was a man wearing a nightie. Thinking that I could pretend to be a woman. It was madness.

And yet how had it come to me so easily? It had turned out that the face that I had, which seemed almost featureless as a man, looked very good as a woman. But why did my gestures and my actions not betray me? How had I fallen into this role so easily?

As I did the night before, I stood in front of the mirror in that dim light. With my penis tucked between closed thighs and my hands cupped on my chest, I struck a pose. If I had a woman’s body everything would be so much simpler.

It was not as if I had many options. I was now trapped in benefit fraud, on top of any crime associated with disposing of Erin’s body. And, in a seeming death wish, I had dated the social worker in charge of my file, or rather the file of my late wife. I was walking a tightrope.

If I was going to continue, I needed to take drastic steps to ensure that my disguise did not slip. I had shaved three times the day before. I needed to do something about the beard. Dolly would know what to do.

Once the girls were off to school, I called her.

“You sound like you need to have your hair done,” she said. “Girls in crisis need to pampered for a while and then step looking gorgeous.”

“Hair on my head is not the problem,” I said. “It is the hair of the face.”

“You don’t have to tell me, Honey,” she said. “Luckily, I do a side-line in electrolysis, starting with my own issue with facial hair. You can come and see me for a session, but the hard part is that you cannot shave so my electric tweezers will have something to grab. You will need to get whiskery, and cover up.”

I shaved that day and went into work. I told Jake that I would need to have the rest of the week at home with all of the files to do a mass reconciliation, indexing and archiving. It mean that I could allow for some beard growth and stay inside. Dolly could then bring her equipment around to my place on Sunday afternoon.

“Let’s lie you back in this chair and get you started,” she said. “And let’s talk. I’m a good listener.”

I was ready to talk. It was not always easy as she started on my chin and top lip and I could only talk with a rigid face, but she seemed to have acquired the ability to understand people talking under such limitations.

“I am starting to think that maybe I am gay,” I said. “These feelings are not me, but they seem real.”

“Or you could be trans,” she said. “Like me.”

“I know what that is,” I said. “That is something that you are born with. You carry it always, and so you need to make changes when you are able.”

“Some people can lie to themselves so well that they don’t even believe that it is a lie,” she said. “Some who find a little happiness in their lives as men, will successfully deny that they are trans, until something happens to remind them that manhood was the lie all along. Something like meeting a man like your man Gray.”

“I have a wife and children,” I said, which would have been true, once.

“And yet here you are, in a dress, having your beard plucked out, permanently. Or as permanently as I can achieve it.”

“This is how I am living,” I explained. “I have to live as a woman for now, but I don’t need a relationship.”

“We all need a relationship, Honey,” she said. “And I am guessing that your wife is no longer around if you are playing the field.”

“You’re right,” I said. “But I have the care of our daughters.”

“Three women and no man,” Dolly noted. “Is that the family unit you want?”

“Grayson wants to be a father,” I explained. “But he wants to focus on fostering children. He believes that children at risk need a proper home with two loving parents. I think he is right.”

‘Well, I didn’t ask about his ideal family unit, but the mere fact that you mentioned him means that he is already included in yours.”

I found myself suddenly getting a little tearful. “But I am not a woman. I could never be his wife.”

“You might say that you are not a woman yet,” she said. “But in fact you are a woman, and I think you always have been one, you just not anatomically correct yet.”

“But I’m …”, I began.

“Everything can be fixed, Honey”, she said. “Now dry your tears and let me finish. Your beard is actually fairly sparse even though it does grow quite quickly. I think another couple of sessions, and your face will be as smooth as a baby’s bottom.”

She gave me cream for my face and showed me how I could use my hair to conceal whiskers on the side of my face and a scarf to hide growth on my neck. That meant that I could go to work and go out, if I took care to hide any side of a beard. Dolly was right. It would only take three sessions.

I went around to her salon for the second electrolysis session, and she presented me with a jar of hormone tablets.

“Don’t be silly,” she said. “Look at yourself. Don’t take them because you need them. Take them because you want them. This is the essence of womanhood. If you want to feel what it is like to want to be feminine, take them. It’s up to you.”

I took them away with me and had the intention of putting them in the bathroom cupboard as some kind of …, I am not sure quite what. Anyway, I had no real intention of swallowing any, until I did. And from then on, I always have.

Grayson had called to ask me out, so I ask Dolly to give me a makeover. She had removed the hair from in front of my ears so she said that I could wear my hair up, and I should wear a top with a high neck to cover the hair on the neck still to be worked over.

“Just make sure that you keep the top on and that he keeps his hands to himself,” she said.

I loved the look that she gave me. It was less dramatic than my first date. It was sophisticated. Dolly said it spoke the words: “Look but don’t touch”. But he did both.

He told me that I looked fantastic. I could see that he believed it. I knew that my look was different from the first date and somehow, I seemed to have adjusted my personality to fit it. I felt slightly more aloof with my hair up in this special hairdo. Maybe I could keep him at arm’s length.

Or maybe not. Before long we were necking in the booth at the restaurant.

“Don’t touch the hair,” I scolded. “It’s special for you but I don’t want it messed up.”

“But maybe later?” I knew what he was expecting. Life would be so much simpler if I could just give it to him. But I could not. I cared for this man, and I was stringing him along in a lie. But it was too dangerous to speak the truth. Not that he was the danger, it was just all the questions that he would ask – like: If you are not the mother of the children, then where is she?

“I’m sorry, Gray,” I said. “While you work for Social Services we can’t …, I want to but …, I really want to explore a relationship, but … I mean, you could be in trouble for this, yes?”

“Yes,” he confirmed. “I just think about you all the time. The risk is worth taking because I want to be with you like this.”

“I don’t want you getting in trouble,” I said. “Maybe the next time you could come to my place?”

So that is what he did.

But first I had my last session with Dolly. And at that session we discussed surgery.

“You might think that this is just something you need to do for a while, but to me it looks fairly permanent,” she said. “You should think about breast implants.”

“Are you crazy?” I spluttered. “I have no money.” But why say that? If I had money, would I do it? I think I was just imagining what it would feel like to have Grayson fondle my real breasts. It was thinking that which made me gasp when he ran his fingers over the silicone forms in my bra, but how good would it feel if they were flesh?

“If you have the money you could do everything in one shot, like I did,” she said. “Breasts on, genitals off. Pole gone, hole installed. Easy.”

Surely, she was teasing me? I tried to laugh a little.

“Get a price, and see what you are aiming for,” she suggested.

“I’m not getting a sex change,” I said.

“Stay informed,” she said. “Things will change before your sex does. I know what I am looking at. And there, that is just about it. Your face is truly feminine now. You no longer have any ghastly male facial, and I can see the softness of the estrogen coming through. Clearly you are taking your medicine. Yor are well on track to becoming a woman.”

Was that what was happening to me.

When I got home I researched sex confirmation surgery. I thought that I was just trying to find out exactly what she was talking about. But if it was all there, why did I send and enquiry, from Erin’s email, asking about schedules and prices. I was pretending to be transgendered, right?

Grayson came around and I made dinner for all four of us.

“I like Grayson,” Hannah whispered in my ear. I just smiled. I liked him too.

But it was harder to accept what Melody asked me while Gray helped Hannah with her homework. She said: “Can Grayson be our Daddy?” It was as if I could never be a daddy ever again. I was a mommy now.

I made some tea after they had gone to bed, and Grayson and I just talked. She started sitting on the sofa together, but soon I was lying on him with my head on his chest while he played with my hair.

He was talking about us again.

“You don’t know me,” I told him. “I have baggage. I am not a good person.”

“I have seen you with your children. Whatever you were once, I know that you are a good person, or now you are.”

“A better person, maybe,” I conceded. “But not somebody good enough for you.”

“You told me last time that you felt the same way as I do about parenting the under-privileged, and the abused, and the needy. That makes you the same as me.”

I was starting to imagine the things we had spoken about before. I was starting to draw a picture in my mind. It was like a Norman Rockwell painting. A big house with a white picket fence. Me standing on the veranda with my girls and a score of other girls and boys playing on the grass out front, and with Grayson Boult standing beside me, with his arm around me, both of us with smiles bigger than the sun.

“It’s a wonderful dream,” I said. “So many sad children out there.”

“Fostering is tough, but I thought that you were up for it,” he said. “Right now we have kids with learning difficulties, gender issues, and stuff like that, in institutions where there problems are magnified, not resolved.”

“Gender issues,” I said – not a question, just repeating the phrase. “A little close to home.”

“Oh,” he said. “Is one of your daughters …?”

“No,” I said. “It’s me.”

It took a moment, but I could feel his body go rigid under me. He took his hand from my hair. I braced for the moment when he would throw me off, onto the floor perhaps, maybe kick me in the belly. Shout, or cry. Or something.

“It can’t be,” he said. He said it softly.

“I should have told you earlier,” I said. “I am a trans-parent. My partner was female, but now there is just me. A solo trans-parent.

“Do you love me?” I could hardly believe that I was hearing those words. How could he ask this? I had deceived this man in the most monstrous way imaginable and he could ask that question? I rolled away to look at him. Our faces were fairly close together. His eyes were wet. Not crying but close to it. Mine were too. Beyond close to crying. There were tears coming from my eyes.

“Yes,” I said. There was no doubt about it. “I ‘m sorry for hurting you, but yes. I do love you.”

“Kiss me then,” he said. So, I did.

He slept with me that night. I had to disappoint him further by removing my breasts, but I think that we were both happy to see the first signs of growth of natural breasts. My groin was something that I kept concealed from him, and he was happy for that.

He asked me about surgery, and I showed him the email I had sent. It was as if I had dispatched it on an impulse which no proved to be inspired.

“I have money so we can arrange things straight away,” he said.

I was nowhere near getting the required approvals. Instead he took the whole of his new family to Thailand the day after he quit working for Social Services. Surgery there requires only a willing patient, and I was that. And support people are encouraged – I had three: My finace Grayson Boult and my daughters Hannah and Melody.

It was not long before we had that larger family that he wanted. Some come and go, but they all know that Grayson and Erin Boult will give their all to be good parents. And every Christmas our house is that Norman Rockwell painting.

And any other time, any of our children, by blood, adoption or just temporary foster care, know that if they need anything, we are their parents and they can always call us for help.

The End

© Maryanne Peters 2019



10 years on flanked by Melody and Hannah with 5 boys in our care.