Specialist Nanny

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

*Authors Note: This story is based on the advertisement that appears in it (page 3) which is close to word for word, what appeared in a national daily in 2017.*

My sister started out in the business by being best babysitter in the neighbourhood. To do that, all she needed to do was to ensure that when anybody that employed her needed a baby sitter, there was always a baby sitter available.

She cursed the fact that she only had two younger brothers. We both did babysitting for her, but as we got older many people were uncomfortable with boys doing the job. We understood why.

That was when my sister first suggested that I babysit as a girl. She insisted that it would be easy. All I needed to do was dress in some of her old clothes and have the right hairstyle. And for that she had just the thing. She had a fake long fake ponytail which became mine. She sometimes braided it so she would call it my “bell-rope”. When she pulled on my bell-rope I was available.

I first started doing it when I was only 12 and I was her little sister Ellyn, rather than her brother Alwyn. It was young to start but she always told the parents concerned that I was very responsible, and she would be on hand if any emergency arose. So, from 12 I had my hair long enough to tie on my bellrope and do the job.

It was not that it was a burden. I made good money, even after her share was deducted. It was just that as her business grew she just assumed I would be part of it.

My older brother Jasper never cross-dressed for the extra jobs and work for him fell away until he just gave up. The fact is that parents just don’t like guys looking after their kids, but as long as they thought that I was a girl, there was no problem. Over time my sister had a huge network that included plenty of girls from school, as well as me, but I was in demand and (after my sister’s first call) I picked the good jobs. And I demanded extra money for those last minute call outs and replacements.

I started out just doing the little kids. Basically that means that they are in bed when I get there and I just have to keep them in bed, and make sure the house doesn’t burn down. As I got older I would have to sit older kids, which means keeping them amused and interacting with them more. And I had to do all this as Ellyn. I could not have my charges telling their parents that a boy in drag was looking after them.

So that meant that it was not easy as my sister promised. I really needed to work on appearing to be female. I think that sometimes kids are more perceptive than adults about such things. But only on two occasions was are I asked something like: “Are you really a girl?” I think that is a measure of just how good I had become at playing this role.

It helped that I was not tall and was of only slight build, but I needed to make some small changes to keep my disguise in place. I have already mentioned that I needed to keep enough hair to permit me to use my fake hair or clip in extensions. I also needed to keep my face in good order – that meant good skin condition, and being clear of whiskers and overgrown eyebrows. But I was always careful to ensure that nothing marked me as appearing effeminate when I was not dressed.

The truth is that with so much of my time being spent babysitting, I had little time for social activities outside school, other than casual sports with a few friends. I was good at most sports, being better than most of my friends, but I was not big or strong enough to be a top performer in any of them, except maybe racquet sports.

I was also quite musical, and that was something that did not conflict with babysitting. I could take my guitar with me to some jobs and just quietly work through the chords. Some homes where I sat had pianos that I could play on. Music is a great way to win over children.

I suppose that the more I did it, the better I got on with kids. As I said, I started by just looking over sleeping children, but when the children are active as their parents leave, the trick is to occupy them but not excite them. That means thoughtful games, or restful music, or just the right viewing on TV or the game console. Some of the skills I learned from my sister, but others I developed myself.

I suppose it was an odd time spent at high school. Days as a boy, afternoons at sports, and evenings (or most of them) spent as a girl, minding kids. But it worked for me. I could move easily between the roles, and I had a bank account bulging with savings.

I started to buy some clothes for after school. I mean that I bought girl clothes. My sister was about the same size as me so there were no hand-me-downs anymore, just shared outfits, and neither of us liked that. I sort of developed my own style. In particular one of the mothers who I sat for, Mrs Tomlin on Haswell Street (2 daughters ages 12 and 11) was a fashion freak. She had me swimming in her magazines and was always quizzing me about clothes and styles, so I had to respond.

If there is one thing I learned about disguise it is that you cannot just put on the clothes and the hair, you need to build a character and live that person when you are in her clothes. My Ellyn was a little shy (not interested in boys so she had time to sit) but musical, and she was interested in sports, but also in fashions, but was maybe a little afraid to express herself.

For that reason, I never wore makeup when on the job. I made sure that my (mainly artificial) hair was tidy and I sometimes took a brush with me to show that I cared about it looking good. Apart from that and the obvious effort I took in keeping my skin clear, of blemishes as well as whiskers, I did not try to look pretty.

I remember one night the Tomlin girls took me in hand and gave me a makeover. They were not even teenagers so it was just for fun, but I agreed to being given the treatment. They had clearly watched their mother or been reading her magazines (or both) because they really did a number on me. I looked so good I was giving myself a hard on in the mirror. Luckily, I could hide it. That would have been hard to explain.

Mr and Mrs Tomlin were good clients. He husband travelled and she sold products weeknights, so I had a lot of business at her place. I could put up with the makeovers, but not the erections. My sister suggested that I take some pills to subdue Mr Happy, and that seemed like a good idea at the time. I was not sexually active so it was not as if I was missing out on anything.

By the time I was looking at colleges I had a substantial fund of my own making. I needed it. My older brother was the smart one and had a scholarship, and my sister was now running a very large business. I needed the college fund if I had any chance of an extended education.

My parents had no real money. My father had been forced to retire early due to an industrial illness and he lived off a compensation package. My mother stayed at home to look after him. They were happy enough, but they wanted better for their kids. They may have been a little puzzled by the transvestite babysitter thing, but they understood that if you want work you have to do what you must.

My father always said that he did not regret putting himself at risk to feed his family, and that he was just unlucky. He believed in luck and said to all of us that we should never ignore a lucky break.

Then my sister showed me the advertisement that had been posted by “Family X”. She told me that she was thinking about putting me forward for what she described as ‘the best nanny job ever’.

*Wanted: Specialist Nanny*

*We are a friendly family of six with 4 children, ages 13, 11 and twins aged 9. We split our time between 4 residencies, which include London, New York, the Bahamas and the South of France.*

*We require a suitable nanny to care for the children and promote their education, health, personal development and progress.*

*The suitable candidate should:*

*\* Have suitable qualifications as a nanny;*

*\* Have a minimum 10 years experience as a nanny.*

*\* Be able to speak French fluently*

*\* Be able to work a six days week, 7am to 8pm*

*\* Be able to assist the children during home schooling and oversee further studies*

*\* Have no children*

*\* Hold a clean drivers license in order to drive the family's Porsche, Maserati and Range Rover on family errands and to appointments*

*\* Abstain from binge drinking and recreational drug taking*

*\* Be ready to sign a non-disclosure agreement*

*In addition we would prefer:*

*\* That she be qualified in child psychology.*

*\* That she share meals with the children as prepared by our 5 star chef*

*\* That she be trained in first aid and life saving techniques and if not, must undertake courses*

*\* That she be trained in self-defense and if not, must undertake a course*

*\* That the nanny be interested in sports.*

*The salary is negotiable but the base package shall be the sum of USD $150,000 per year, not including all accommodation and meals, relocation to the designated home city on scheduled breaks, and reasonable expenses*

*We would politely request that you do not even bother making an application if it would be a waste of our time and yours.*

“You could get this job,” she said.

As it happens, I do speak French. Our mother is French and she tried to raise all three of her children as bilingual, but when she spoke to each of us in French it was only I who would reply in French. Both my brother and sister understood French perfectly but neither would say they spoke the language. I do.

Apart from that, the fact that I had a clean driving license and did not drink excessively or use drugs, I could not see how I was qualified. I said: “I would be a great job, but I don’t have the qualifications.”

“Nonsense,” said my sister. “In addition to the agency I have set up a Nanny School that can issue you a qualification tomorrow. My agency company can confirm that you have 6 years of experience. We can get the first aid and life-saving qualifications within a week. Maybe not the self-defense, but we could sign you up for a course. Okay, so you have an outside chance, but with a testimonial from my agency, you could have a good shot.”

“But just one other fly in this ointment,” I said. “This is an ad for a Nanny. They say: ‘she must be trained’. So, I can pull off a night on a couch dressed as a girl, but not living as female 24/7! No way.”

“You underestimate yourself,” she said. “And me.”

What the hell? Why not give it a shot? I figured that if I could walk away with the better part of the salary with everything being paid for, I could put off college for a year and have four times the fund I had spent 6 years accumulating.

It was not as if I would get the job. They were looking for a much older woman. Hell, they were looking for Mary Poppins. I was not sure that they would find anybody as perfect as the description. It would not be me, and I would lose nothing by throwing my hat in the ring.

So, I put together a CV. My sister paid for some courses to fill the gaps, and presented me with a diploma from her own Nanny School, and a glowing testimonial from the agency, both signed by her boyfriend who was notional Chief Executive Officer (she ran everything as ‘Executive Chair’). My CV concentrated on my youth and ability to relate to young people, and my love of sports, and travel. At least I thought I would love travel, once I collected my first passport.

My sister and I joked about it, and with my brother and my parents we laughed about the ad and what kind of people this family could be. We did not know their name at the time, but I will continue to call them ‘Family X’ to conceal their identity, with even the first names substituted in my story.

Hers was not the only nanny agency to be asked to find the candidate, so she was surprised that I even made the shortlist. From that list the clients would pick people for an interview. There would be two people interviewed in New York City, and I would be one of them.

“We need to get you ready,” she said. “You need to make your first trip to the beauty shop.”

Up until this point it had just a bit of fun. The ad was so crazy that it seemed like a practical joke. But then my sister showed me the air tickets to NYC and the hotel booking, it seemed real.

“I don’t want any serious changes,” I said. “There is no way I will get this position, so I still want to look like me at the end of this process.” The reason for my concern is that I was about to get a new hairstyle and have my eyebrows shaped and eyelashes tinted.

“You might have to wear a cap for a while if you miss out.” My sister was less than helpful.

I had hair long in front to pull back for my pony tail, so the style agreed upon was a blunt bob. With the work on the face I was surprised to see what a difference it made. As the babysitter I had been able to achieve my disguise with my voice and actions, rather than my look. The Tomlin girls’ makeovers were like dressing a doll, but with the professional treatment the outcome was amazing. I looked hot!

My sister also selected an outfit to attend the interview. She went for a corporate look with low heels. It was the first time I had worn heels, let alone owned a pair, but I found that I easily got used to walking in them. My sister also bought me a bag, with all necessary feminine contents.

Under my outfit I had female underwear, including a padded bra and ‘form enhancing’ underpants. It was the first time that I had worn anything like that. When I worked as Ellyn the only undergarment that mattered was a tight panty to conceal my junk when I wore jeans or leggings. I had never worn anything so feminine in my life. But I felt very comfortable in it. In fact, maybe a little bit empowered and confident as a result of it.

I am going to call him Matt, but that was not the name of the husband and father who was the head of Family X. He had a suite in the hotel I was staying in, a floor above me. The interview took place late in the afternoon, in the suite.

I started with a firm handshake. I thought afterwards that maybe it was too firm, like a young man, not a young woman. I felt that I needed to maybe wind things back a little, and be a little more feminine.

“You are very young,” he said. “That is not what we are looking for. But I was intrigued and wanted to meet you. You are not on my wife’s list. Apart from you, the youngest on her list is 32.”

“I suppose it is a question of style,” I said. “I do not manage children. I like to work with them to manage themselves. I believe in discipline, but I think that comes from within. Or at least, if it is to carry them through life, it should come from within.”

“You seem wise for your age, and responsible,” he said. “But you seem only a few years older than my oldest, my daughter Lauren. Although my three sons are quite a bit younger.”

“She sounds mature, and as the oldest she probably is,” I guessed. “I think that she needs a friend and guide rather than a governess. But I like caring for boys best, and I always think boys need a little more control.”

He smiled. “My wife thinks that the boys need a child psychologist, but I think that she does not understand the male mind,” he said. I thought that ironic.

He questioned me in French and seemed satisfied with my knowledge of the language.

“I am in sports management and events,” he said. “I understand that you are interested in sport?”

His primary professional involvement was in tennis and golf, with some soccer thrown in. I was able to show him that I knew the key competitions and players, and he seemed pleased. In fact, he seemed pleased with the whole interview but the time he announced it was over.

It was clear to me that he was looking for somebody much older and more experienced, so when I fell asleep in my hotel bed that night, a few floors down from his suite, I did not think I had a show. And that was OK. I had given it a shot.

The following day I decided to go down for the included breakfast. For some reason I put on the shaping underwear but over it I wore my go-to babysitting outfit – a girl’s pink tracksuit and sneakers. It was the outfit that made me looked like a girl because it covered me and was shapeless. But it was too small for now and it hugged the shape that the underwear had created. But I had not realised that until I was in the lift and looking in the mirror in there, but Matt was in there too.

“Good morning,” he said, cheerily. “Going for a run?”

“Just a short one,” I said. I was wearing this tight suit and had no makeup on, but my hair looked good. To hell with it, I looked pretty good all over.

“Let’s run together,” He said. “I have a route through the park. Just 3 miles.”

I said it sounded just enough, so I followed him out. I was not really wearing running shoes, just sneakers, but now I was stuck.

Even at that hour there were people in the park playing ball. A ball rolled up to us and I could not resist picking it up and throwing it back.

“I don’t think I have ever seen a girl throw that well,” he said. It had been a snappy throw right to the glove of a guy standing 30 yards off, but it was standard for any good first basemen. But I grinned at the compliment.

“I don’t just follow sport, you know,” I said. “You should see me with a basketball or a soccer ball.”

He clearly liked a challenge. We ran past a hoop court and he paid some guys playing there $20.00 for 10 shots with their ball – five each. I landed all 5, and he missed one.

“I should have put money on it,” I said. He laughed. We ran on.

It is always hard to run and talk but we exchanged a few more words about sport before we got back to the hotel. He told me that he would have loved to have breakfast with me, but he had meetings all morning, and I would be flying to Europe before lunch. He said: “I do hope that we meet again, Ellyn.”

I shook his hand and I found myself hoping that we would. Hoping against hope that I might get the job.

And then I did.

My sister could not believe it, but she was very happy. She was getting a placement fee of 20% of my first year’s salary, half now and half later. She said that she would need to spend some of the money on getting me ready for the job.

“I cannot believe that they would give the job to me,” I said. “I’m too young.” The problem that I was also not female, seemed to barely register.

“I understand that it’s about sport,” she said. “But right now we need to get you ready to be a girl full time. That means the Brazilian wax and proper tucking, and you need to give thought to having boobs.”

“You have to be kidding,” I exclaimed.

“No, I’m serious,” she said. “We are in winter now, but how are you going to nanny these kids in the Bahamas in a bikini, with no boobs and a bulge in your crotch?”

“I just have to wear clothes.” I said the words, but I knew she had a point. “But how would you fix it if I did take it a bit further? Nothing permanent. Remember I only want this job for the money. And the travel. And maybe to sample the high life for bit. But it is mainly for the money.”

She put an arm around me, and said: “This is going to be great, Bro. But if you want to spend a year as Ellyn, globe-trotting nanny to the rich and famous, take my advice and go all out woman. Leave it to me. I want to pick up the full fee, so I am happy to foot the bill.”

In fact, some of the bill in preparing me for the role was paid for by Family X. They paid for me to complete courses in first aid and life-saving (it helped that I was a good swimmer) and for a self-defense course offered by a security company that included anti-kidnapping and driving technique to evade car-jacking. It was all full on. They even paid for text books on child psychology and “Raising Difficult Children”. I read a little of them, but it could have been Sanskrit for all I could understand. I started to wonder what these kids were going to be like.

Then I went in for ‘the small procedure’. The implants I was told were intended to be a modest size but seemed huge on my chest. The doctor assured me that they could be easily removed.

My sister also paid for me to spend a day with a somebody who described herself as ‘a successful transwoman’. If by that she meant totally convincing as female, she was. She taught me a few essentials such as how to tuck, and tips on walking and running. She told me that because I had been ‘a weekend woman’ for years, with gestures based on my observations, I had a head start, but I was still ‘a tomboy’ and in need of some refinement.

I started on the job officially, on the first of the month following. I was booked to fly out to London (business class), the night before, to report the following morning. I was to spend the day with my sister getting ready.

She had laid out an outfit for me. I was only just out of the surgical support and I put on a lacy woman’s bra for the first time, with my new breasts nestling into the cups, stitches underneath only just having come out. There were lacy panties too, over the special gaff thing that was used to tuck my bits away. The dress she had selected was ideal for travel – comfortable and uncreasable, such items would become a standard for a travelling nanny.

“Don’t let me down,” she said. “I lose half my commission if you don’t complete a year. But more importantly, this is a huge deal for my business. If you see out the year I will be providing nanny services to the rich and famous.”

She saw me off with assurances that she was there for any issues, day or night. But by the time I boarded the plane and took my luxurious seat, I felt confident that I could do this. It was just minding kids, and I knew I could do that.

There was a man with a card with my name on it waiting on arrival, and car to whisk me the large townhouse in Kensington near central London. This was the first time I had been in any overseas country and I just stared out the window the whole way. This was all so strange, and exciting.

There was a maid to meet me at the door. She had me put my bag down and escort me immediately to meet the lady of the house, whom I shall call Delphine. She was in her studio. She was a strikingly beautiful woman. She was wearing a rather odd jumpsuit and had her hair wound up in a brightly coloured silk scarf. She was working on some kind of artwork in the nature of collage.

“I don’t know anything about art,” I said. “But I really like this.” It was awful.

She was strange. I liked her. But she was frank about my selection as nanny.

“I wanted somebody older,” she said. “Somebody with more experience, and perhaps more able to understand the children. But Matt insisted that we choose you. He is in the sports business and he thinks all the children should be more involved in sport. None of the other carers had any interest in sport at all. You do, I understand?”

I started to wonder if the children might be as mad as she appeared to be.

She suggested that I go upstairs to my room and shower and change so that we could lunch together. She also changed into a stylish dress. The maid told her that lunch was laid out for us, but she simply said: “No, no. We’re going out.”

We went to her favourite local place, where she had not booked but was able to insist on a table. She selected items that were not on the menu. I could see that the staff were exasperated with her, but totally understanding. I chose something from the menu.

“Will you drink wine?” she asked. When I declined, she insisted. “You need to taste it at least. I appreciate that you do not drink when you are on duty, so to speak, but you have to understand the good things in life, in order to understand us.” The wine was delicious, but I only just had a little. She drank the rest of the bottle.

“We have a daughter Lauren, who goes to a local school,” she explained. “She will be home around 3:30. The twin boys, Miles and Chet, have soccer practice after school so they will be home later. Our middle son, Pete, is away tonight, but he will be back tomorrow.”

“I am looking forward to meeting them all,” I said. “But with all the children at school, what would you like me to do during the day?”

“Well there is a lot for you to learn,” she said. “You will need to get up to date on all the study programs for each of the children, as schoolwork must continue when they travel with us. And can I say, my dear, that you will also need to learn something about presenting yourself. I am happy to be your guide. You can be my goodwill project.”

Before we left the chef came over to speak with her. He was French and spoke to her in that language. Her reply in French also had me puzzled. I knew some accents because in speaking the language I had met many Francophones from all over France and the world, but I could not place hers. I also exchanged a few words in French with the chef. When she spoke again, he winked at me.

I sort of became her companion from then on. I was to become an effective nanny for her, but not until later.

The first of my subjects was Lauren. She swept in as I was talking to Delphine about food preferences for each of the children. She was slim and tall for her age. She seemed to be able to greet meet but by barely acknowledging me.

“I would love to see your room,” I volunteered, trying to break through.

Lauren looked at me suspiciously, but then she said: “Ok.”

It was evident that Lauren was interested in fashion. Her room was huge and bright with large windows, but any wall space seemed to be filled with posters from fashion magazines. Closets were open and seemed brim full of clothes. There was no sign of the sporting stars that I had seen in the rooms of the other children that were not locked. All I could say was: “Wow.”

“Are you interested in clothes?” she asked me.

“It’s not how I was brought up, I explained. “But yes, I am. I have just been told by your mother that I was chosen because I am sporty. But you mother has volunteered to help me brush up on style.”

“Take my advice,” she said. “Do not go with my mother’s sense of style. She is crazy. She seems to get away with it, but I would never go there. Besides, you seem really young?”

“I’m only eighteen,” I said. “I am here to nanny the kids, not you. I hope we can be just friends.”

She looked at me again, but not so suspiciously this time. I could see that she had the look of her father about her, but a body that would grow to be like her mothers. She asked: “Do you play tennis?”

“I love all racket sports,” I said. “But I warn you, I am good.”

She smiled, the first time I had seen it. Like her father’s smile it was warm and genuine. She said: “Friends then.” That was what we became.

The twins came home while we were still talking. We could hear the maid complaining that they were covered in mud and needed to wash downstairs in the laundry.

“Do you want to meet the monsters?” asked Lauren.

“No,” I said. “Not yet anyway. Let’s enjoy a little more girl time.”

Miles and Chet were identical twins. Good looking boys with tanned skin and blond hair. They were both cleaned up and were wearing matching track suits. They were grinning when their mother introduced them to me, and both simultaneously poked out their tongues at me when her back was turned. When she was not looking I returned the gesture. I could see that they were both thinking about how they could annoy or embarrass me. I was not without experience handling boys like this. The truth is, I had been one.

I had bonded with both Delphine and Lauren quickly, but it took some days before I meshed with these boys. And we did so only through sport. They were mad on soccer and baseball. I was keen on both too, and I had skills. It was not until the weekend that I had time to show them what we had in common and build on that.

I learned that their mother regarded them almost as creatures from another planet. She had no appreciation of what they liked. She lived in a curious world of art and fashion, and she clearly adored her husband, but he was the only male that she had any time for. To make matters worse, the twins had developed a code of tongue clicking that they used between them, which she thought was an alien language.

Most strange of all, from her point of view, was that these boys were hyper-active. Probably a high sugar diet did not help, but they were physically energetic kids. Delphine seemed convinced that they had some diagnosable condition that could be cured with drugs.

I did not meet Peter until the following day. It became clear that Delphine was the most concerned about him. It was clear that he was withdrawn and probably depressed. He looked like his mother. He had her big green eyes and fine features. Like his younger brothers he was interested in sports and had sports and music posters on his wall, but did not have the same vigour.

I felt that it would take even more time to get through to Pete, and that is how it was. Weeks, in fact, before I found out what was behind his problems.

However, one thing was clear to me by the time Matt returned from his travels on Friday night – the real person in need of psychotherapy, was Delphine.

I am not sure whether Matt had chosen me with this issue in mind, or not. A more professional nanny might well have said ‘I do children, not childish adults’, but I was ready to take on the entire family. In fact, if it comes to mental health, it might be best to treat the family as a single unit, where each person can draw support from the others. Anyway, I took to the task with enthusiasm.

I sort of had to be two people. For Pete and the twins I was the active tomboy nanny, keeping them engaged in physical exercise and study to the point that they were exhausted every night. For Delphine and Lauren I was a project in converting the American tomboy into an international sophisticated and stylish young woman. It was made a little complicated by the fact that they were often in conflict about what was right for me, so I found myself finding my own middle path – developing something of my own style. It was closer to the rules of fashion that I had learned from Mrs Tomlin.

Both Delphine and Lauren were agreed that I needed to grow my hair out and that I should have my ears pierced. They also agreed that my walk ‘looks like a man’s walk’ and that I needed to present myself in a more feminine way. They both offered advice on oufits and accessories and I benefitted from hand-me-downs from mother and daughter. Fortunately I could squeeze into Delphine’s clothes although she was narrower in the shoulders than me, and in time Lauren was the same size as me. I had the same shoe size as Delphine – quite large. Apart from sports and swim wear I found that I needed to buy very few clothes.

I needed swimwear that could conceal my bulge on our first trip to the south of France. Tucking for swimming demands duct tape. It is uncomfortable, and there is no chance to pee unless a small whole is added and you pee in the sea. To conceal the tape job requires dark colours and preferably ruffled fabric. But it was necessary, as even the nanny seems to live in a swimming costume as all of the family does when on summer holidays.

I had the same issue in our trip to the Caribbean. The family had a small place near St Johns in the Virgin Islands. It was smaller than the house at Antibes, but I still had my own room. It was the only place where the twins had to share a room, but to be honest they often slept in one another’s room in the other houses.

On the way back from that holiday we spent a few weeks in New York where Matt’s family live. I was able to take some time off and be with my family for Thanksgiving. I had only women’s clothing so that was how I turned up, and how I stayed. Only Jasper’s new girlfriend required an explanation.

It did not worry my father when I sat down to dinner in a dress with my hair up and drop earrings in. I had brought French wine and liqueurs with me, plus treats from the Caribbean and I contributed to the costs of the meal. From the stories I had told he said that this was my ‘lucky break’ and I should go with it as long as I could.

I left behind nice Christmas presents and said I would call. Christmas was expected to be a busy time with Family X.

It was those next few weeks that saw the beginning of the collapse of Delphine, but not before I finally got to the bottom of what was ailing Pete. I found him sobbing in the bathroom of the apartment so I went in to check what was wrong.

“It’s happening,” he whimpered. “It’s a dark whisker.” He was point to something on his chin. He had only just turned 12, so that would be early for puberty. Whatever it was, a damp cloth made it disappear. So why was it so upsetting? When I was his age I was always on the look out for such things, but I had a job that needed to be protected.

Suddenly I knew. I said: “You don’t want to be a boy, do you Petey?”

He looked at me with the tears welling up again. He cried: “No. I want to be a girl. A girl just like you.” How funny that sounded, to somebody in my position.

‘You can be,” I said. “If you want to be a girl just like me, you can be.”

I did not do it straight away. We talked a lot more about how he had wrestled with this thing from as long as he could remember, how he liked some boy things, but yearned to be able to do girl things, how he worried about what his father and his mother would think, and how nobody could understand what he was going through. So, I swore him to secrecy and I showed him my little secret.

“Now this is between us,” I said. “When you are dressed as a girl you will understand. What lies between your legs is nobody’s business but yours. But we need to tell your parents. Not about me, but about you. They know you are sad. They want you to be happy. If we tell them, I hope that they will support you. I think they will. If they do, then you can take drugs to prevent puberty. And later you can take drugs to develop as a girl. I take those drugs.”

We decided to go to Delphine first. She had been acting strangely for a few days but this news seemed to free her from whatever fog she had been in.

“Darling Petey,” she gushed. “Whether you are in pants or skirts you are still my child, and I love you.” Petey just cried his eyes out. It was a beautiful thing. I felt so proud of him, and so proud of Delphine too.

When he got home both she and Petey explained it to Matt. I had been on the side-line throughout but he turned to me for guidance.

“I’m no expert,” I said. It was not a lie. “You should have a doctor confirm it. But I think that it is well known that life is very difficult for transkids, and some get very depressed and even suicidal. I think that because Pete enjoys his sport so much his sadness has not been so visible, but it has always been there. I think now we understand what is behind it.”

“So you want to be a girl, like your mother, Pete?”

“Like Ellie,” he said. “I want to be a girl like Ellyn.”

Matt changed plans and got him a guitar for Christmas. Pete would have been happy to get sports equipment like the twins, but he had wanted a guitar. Better still, his mother bought him a pink camisole top to wear under his shirts. It was a sensitive gift from a caring mother.

“We can arrange guitar lessons in the New Year,” said Matt.

“I can show you a few chords now, if you like,” I said, tuning it and tickling out a few tunes.

“Is there anything you cannot do?” said Matt. “You are like Maria from the Sound of Music.”

“To your Captain Von Trapp?” I asked.

The Sound of Music became the theme for the day and several days after Christmas. It would have been perfect except that the illness that had been gestating in Delphine broke out before the end of the year.

I did not know it, but Delphine had been on anti-psychotic drugs for almost five years prior to me starting. She was not always dutiful in taking them, but that was not the problem. Her problems were beyond this treatment. Matt told me later that she had always been eccentric, but beauty and eccentricity can be an alluring package. To add to that Delphine was a genuinely kind person, and she loved her husband. She loved her children too, but they seemed to be a mystery to her.

I also learned that some of the odd behaviour that had me in attendance clearing up small misunderstandings or reminding her of important things forgotten, where symptoms of the drugs rather than the illness. The affliction when fully revealed included delusions and a split personality. There was somebody other than Delphine inside this woman.

Much later I learned that Delphine was not her real name and she was not even from France. She was born Dorothy Hatch in Grafton, North Dakota, but she loved all things French. She had studied it at school and with a family in Winnipeg across the border. Then when she was old enough she went to France and reinvented herself as a French fashion model.

But it was not Dorothy either, who broke forth the evening of the Kimbolton’s party. Whoever it was she was so violent and destructive that the police needed to be called and she needed to be removed to custodial care.

Matt visited her alone the first few times, but then asked me to come with him, to assess whether a visit from the children was feasible. She was heavily drugged and looked awful. Somehow despite everything she still looked beautiful, even without make up and with her hair appearing to have been pulled out in clumps. I suggested that for the children to see her would do more harm than good. He agreed.

We spoke to the children together that night. The truth is that they all knew. Children do know these things. Matt knew. I only suspected something was wrong. As I said, intended or not, Delphine was the fifth child in my care, so I felt that I should have recognised the problem earlier and tried to do something.

“Don’t beat yourself up that way,” said Matt. “I should have told you everything. It was just that she was doing so well. I don’t think it is anything we said or did. It was just lying dormant in her.”

He was very shaken by the whole thing. We both were. I guess that is why we ended up holding one another. Human contact can be so comforting in this kind of crisis. We just held on to one another. That should have been the end of it, but then we kissed. It was totally inappropriate, but it was heavenly.

I broke off and ran to my room. I am sure that he felt that I was just being professional – a nanny should not be intimate with her boss. But in fact, it was confusion. It should have been disgust. After all, I was a heterosexual male, albeit masquerading as a female, kissing a man. How could I do that? Even more puzzling, how could I enjoy it? Enjoy is not the right word – I relished it. I longed for it again. How is any of that possible without me being gay?

Every January the family would relocate to St Johns, but we all felt uncomfortable leaving Delphine behind. Nobody was looking forward to January in London, and to make matters worse Matt had a tennis tournament in Australia that he needed to attend. I felt that I needed to cool things off between Matt and myself so I was happy to stay behind with the kids, but they wanted to go to the Caribbean.

“What about your mother?” he asked over dinner. “We cannot leave her here in a hospital while the whole family leaves the country for a southern summer?”

I supported staying. There was a little agonising, but in the end, it was 5 against 1. I was flattered to even be allowed a vote.

We flew to Australia, all of us in business class. We had a stopover in New York and one in Los Angeles with a full day at Disneyland.

I put the children to work with their studies in Australia. I pointed out that this was not a holiday, just a better climate. We got an apartment near the beach. There were no servants, so I did he cooking and we did everything ourselves with duties allocated by me. It was hot, and we swam in the sea, played tennis, and other sports. We lived a different life for a month or so.

The best thing for Pete was that from the moment he arrived in Australia he became Peta and lived as a girl. He had wanted another name, but I persuaded her to stick with the feminine spelling of her own name, because it is not a name that makes a girl. She loved it, and her siblings were totally behind her.

Matt called Delphine every second day, but she had no idea who he was. Her condition was very poor and the prognosis was not good.

“The truth is that I have sort known this might happen since the first real episode after the twins were born,” he said. “From that point I understood that she was fragile. Then cracks appeared 5 years ago. Now this. If she cannot control it, or if drugs cannot control it, then she is too dangerous to be allowed out of an institution.”

I wanted to hug him, but I was worried about my own sanity. Would I kiss him again if I did?

In fact, I did kiss him again, but in very different circumstances.

The tennis tournament was very successful for him and he was able to sign on new talent. He threw a party and he needed a hostess. I suggested that Lauren was a very mature 14-year-old and would be turning 15 that year, but he ruled that out.

“She can come and stay until 10:00pm,” he said. “But you will be the hostess. Here is a second credit card for you. Have Lauren style you both at a salon of your choice.”

In fact we took Peta to the salon too, even though she was not going to the party. We all had total makeovers. I had my hair put up, and so did Lauren. Peta had curls done. We all had manicures, pedicures and makeup done.

Lauren had chosen dresses for all of us, and we all looked fantastic. We all agreed that instead of turning up 30 minutes before the party started, we would text a message and arrive 30 minutes late, so we could make an entrance. It was some entrance.

Matt told me later that he had been very angry that I was not there to greet the guest arriving with him, but he said nothing on the night. Perhaps it was because he lost the muscles in his jaw for a while after we entered. But after that he was introducing me as “your hostess, Ellyn”. Peta was sent packing shortly after we arrived, but not before her father had a chance to see just what a beautiful woman she someday would be. Lauren was allowed to stay on until 11:00pm as she was such a hit and was not overdoing the drink. I stayed on until the end, when the last guest left shortly after 1:00am.

We closed the door on that last guest together and we just stood there by the door looking at one another. He said: “You were fantastic tonight, and you look incredible.”

“The modern nanny must be ready for anything,” I smiled.

That was when he kissed me. I did not break off this time. It was not that it was any less inappropriate, it was just that I wanted his tongue in my mouth more than anything. I would gladly have taken any part of him in my mouth. It did not matter to me any more that I was not behaving as a man should. I did not feel like a man, not then anyway. My hair was up, my make up was perfect, my drop earrings were shimmering, my dress screamed sexy, my perfume was intoxicating him, of course he was going to kiss me, and I was going to kiss back.

For the first time, I wished that I had a vagina. I wished that my body could swallow up what I had a leave a tunnel for him to invade in its place. I would have let him take me there, on the sofa or the table, or even on the floor.

Our lips parted and he looked at me again, without speaking.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I am way too tired.” And I did not have a vagina.

“That’s alright,” he said. “We have another big day tomorrow.”

I was not tired at all. I was excited. I spent a while takin down my hair and brushing it. As I looked in the mirror I realised for the first time that I was beautiful. Everybody at the party thought so, and it was not just talk. It was true. My blond hair, big blue eyes, strong features, athletic body. I made a much better woman than a man.

When I looked at my chin for blemishes I realised that I had never had a whisker. From the beginning of puberty I had pulled every hair out so that I could babysit as a girl. I had been a boy, but I had never really been a man. Could I ever be one? Not looking like this, that was for sure.

I slept and dreamt girly dreams. Do not ask me what, but they were girly.

Even after such a late night I was up early, making a big breakfast for everybody, and planning the day. Matt had meetings but promised to be back by 3:00pm so we could go to the beach together.

It was another whirlwind of a day, and ended only when I tucked the twins into bed while Matt attended to Peta.

I returned to the living room to find him sitting in the armchair looking very unhappy.

“Are you alright?” I asked him.

“Actually, I am feeling a little bit sick,” he said. “I have to question you, and I am very worried about the answers you might give me. Even then, I need you to be honest.”

I knew this was serious. He had never looked at me this way before. It was not pleasant. And then he spilled some pills onto the coffee table. I recognised them immediately.

“Peta is on the puberty delaying stuff, but I have denied her the feminising drugs. Then I find these.” He paused to look at me for a response, but I had nothing to say. “She told me that she took them from your room.” I still said nothing in the pause he provided. “I didn’t believe her. Then she said you needed them.” What could I say. I was starting to shake. My eyes were becoming moist despite my best efforts. “She said that you are a boy, just like her.”

I knew what I had to do. I raised my head and I looked him in the eyes. Even though mine were full of tears, I could still see those wonderful eyes. I said: “Yes.”

I could see that I had just punched him in the guts. He said: “So you have deceived me, all along.”

“Yes.” If the pills on the table were cyanide, I would have swallowed all of them in that moment.

“What do you expect me to do?” he asked.

What indeed. Turn back time? Magically turn me into the woman of your dreams?

“Be understanding?” I suggested.

He leaned forward and put his head in his hands. He muttered something. I thought I heard the words, but it made no sense. I said: “I’m sorry.” It was not to have him repeat the words but to apologise for what I had done.

Did you not hear me?” he said. “I said that the problem is that I have fallen in love with you.”

If I had few words when he found out my secret, I had none when I found out his. I just got up and sat on the sofa next to him. Not touching. Not even close. Just not with a table between us. But I still needed to think. When had I fallen in love with him? There was no doubt that I was, just when was the issue. Could it really have been the day I met him? The day he missed the basket in the Park with his final throw? Then I was a boy with eyes only for women, but it seemed like it all started then, when I prayed that I would get the job and be near him. I was sure that I was already in love with him well before last night.

I said: “I’ve been in love with you since the day we met.” Because I knew that must be true.

He turned to me and then drew himself towards me along the cushions. He tenderly brushed the tears from my cheeks, and my hair back over my shoulder. He kissed me lovingly.

We flew back to London through Thailand. I did my research and found just the place for the children to stay and for Matt to really relax, while I went through a few more procedures, this time not so minor. I was still sore, and a visiting outpatient when I was back at the resort, but everyone was enjoying the break.

Peta came with me to check out what was involved. She had been on the puberty blockers for months and perhaps assisted by the hormones she cheekily took from my supply, she was looking increasingly girlish with her hair growing out. She was able to share the journey with me, and even look at the finished work. She was still only 12 when it was all done, but she understood everything. She was looking forward to the day when she too, could have a perfect vagina fashioned from her unwanted organs.

It was something that I never wanted, but it was now as essential to me as my eyes. I simply could not contemplate life without a vagina, because that is what Matt wanted me to have. By the time we left Thailand, manhood was only a distant memory. It seemed to me that I had been a woman for most of my remembered life, just masquerading as a boy at school and for sport. The pink tracksuit, playing with my long braid, dressing up dolls with my young charges, makeovers with the Tomlin girls. That was my youth. Memories of a boyhood seemed to have faded away.

Looked at it that way, an adult life as a man seemed impossible. Now it was.

Now I could have sex with Matt. We both wanted it. It was exquisite. We were a perfect fit. After all, my internal anatomy was made just for him.

The kids knew about us too – at least Lauren and Peta understood what we were up to. We did it often enough. For Miles and Chet they only knew that we now held hands and cuddled. I was their mother now. Sure, I was “Ellie” not “Mom” but they were closer to me than they had ever been to Delphine.

Matt and I visited Delphine together. She was completely oblivious to us. She was either in a drugged stupor or engaged in arguments with non-existent people. She had taken to fighting with these imagined creatures, which consisted of throwing herself about the room, often bruising and scratching herself. It was heart-breaking.

Matt and I both loved her in our own ways. But we loved one another even more. She even saw us holding hands and she smiled. It seemed to both of us that she approved of us being together – anyway, we like to think that.

She died after a year. In some imagined struggle, she threw herself off a toilet partition onto the floor and broke her neck. We had a memorial service for her and quite a few people turned up. Everybody who did know her, knew her for what she was – a good and kind person with a disease of the mind that made her sometimes brilliant and sometimes dangerous. None of the children cried at the funeral. In fact the party afterwards was full of good humor. Memories of her were positive, and still are.

We waited almost a year before announcing our engagement. Lauren and her spectacularly beautiful sister Peta were my bridal attendants, led by my sister. Matt’s best man was a well-known tennis player (I could not possible say his name), assisted by Miles and Chet, both aged 12 on our wedding day, and looking much older in their tailored suits.

Peta has been told that she must still wait 2 years until she is 16 before she can have her operation, but at the wedding she was approached by one of Delphine’s old friends and offered modelling jobs. Matt and I are supportive but cautious.

My father gave me away. Both of my parents were totally accepting of me, perhaps because I have the perfect man and a ready-made family they can grandparent. And they love the free tickets to sporting events.

As I have said, my father believes in luck and told me that I had it. He has had a little bit of his own recently. My sister has extended her nanny services to care for the aged or chronically ill, and my father has become a paid spokesperson for this extension of the enterprise. Her nanny business just kept on getting better after I picked up my job and pushed her into the big time. I constantly remind my sister that I am the key to her success.

The End

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