The Cure

A Short (Fantasy) Story

By Maryanne Peters

There was a time when John Garside dreamed that he could live as a woman. There was a time when he thought that might be an option. It did not seem enough for him to shave his legs and squeeze into his corset and slip on a pretty frock and stockings. There was a time when he dreamed of more. But that time was long before his illness.

In high school he discovered his talent for sports, and people with talents should use them, as everyone knew and most said. The downside for somebody like John is that an athletic male body is even further away from a female body. He had to put aside feminine things.

Later he looked at returning to what he craved, but yet again life intervened. Everybody he knew was pairing off and asking who he was with. And then she was there, and they were an item, and then they were husband and wife. It was almost as if he barely ha a say in it.

When you look back on a life, you wonder where all those years went. Does that mean that they were well spent? John liked to think so, despite the fact that it was not the life he wished he had been able to lead. They had three children, and now he had six grandchildren. His wife had stood by him, with all his faults and foibles. And he had stood by her, right up until the end, when she died holding his hand surrounded by people who loved her more than he did.

It seemed only right and proper that he should be diagnosed with a terminal illness within a year of her death. It seemed the right way to close out his life. They raised a family, they lived in a world of love, and died only a year apart. The thought made him smile. How can you fear death after such a life?

“But there is a possible treatment.” As you confront death with resignation and even happiness, only a scientist could make such a statement. A physician, Dr. Patrick Lambert, a supposed expert in this particular form of cancer. “It is experimental and radical, but we could look at trying it on you?”

John shook his head. “Don’t waste time and money on this old thing,” he said, with a smile that was more ironic than selfdeprecating.

“Frankly, your age makes you a prime candidate,” said the young doctor. “It involves transplanted tissue from a family member, grown for you. The older you are the less aggressive your immune system is – the less likely your body is to reject the tissue. The treatment could give you a few more years, or it may even cure you, although I make no promises.”

He was about to deliver a firm no, but before he could say anything, his granddaughter Melody, there to support him as she wanted, spoke – “You should at least look into it, Pops.”

“You should at least allow us to look at tissue compatibility within your family,” said Dr. Lambert. “Without a match we can do nothing. A simple blood test is all that is required. Just a finger prick.”

“Please consider it, Pops,” said Melody imploringly. She was the first to offer her blood up to be sampled, and by chance she was the closest match. All his children and all other grandchildren were tested, but it was John’s devoted Melody who was closest to him biologically. Somehow that did not seem surprising.

“You will have to explain this to me,” John said.

“Well, we grow tissue inside your granddaughter’s body similar to stem cells that are still ambivalent as to their future form,” said the young doctor. “We can do this in a matter of days by using special growth enhancement techniques. Then we cut away the diseased material and we replace it with this transplanted material and let it continue to grow and replace damaged flesh and blood. It is revolutionary and we sincerely hope that it works, but it might not. Even if it does work, it might only give you a bit more time with your family.”

“But I am dead anyway, correct?” said John. “if I do nothing then I have only months.”

“Yes, but more likely weeks,” said Dr. Lambert with a concise honesty that John admired.

“I want to do it,” said Melody. “I want to help to keep you alive, Pops.”

“Does my granddaughter face any risks?” asked John.

“No,” said Dr. Lambert. “She is simply a donor.”

For John he was ready to die, and in some way, he was almost happy for the procedure to fail. But for Melody he would go ahead with it. He would give her the satisfaction that she had done all she could to buy her “Pops” a few more months. That would not seem unreasonable.

They needed all of the time that John had left to grow the new cells. In fact, John collapsed and was taken to hospital. It seemed unlikely that the tissue transplant might even occur given his weak state, but Dr Lambert and his team were able to operate on his failing body in the full knowledge that there was a high probability that he would die on the operating table. He did not … although perhaps he did?

The medical team was only interested in what was happening internally and cure to what was killing him - they were not looking for what was happening to John’s body externally. They only saw the cells from his granddaughter were indeed repairing the diseased organs and slowly rebuilding into robust and even youthful key organs. As far as they were concerned, John Garside was ready to be released when these organs were sufficiently developed, and there was no sign of the disease returning.

People were amazed that he had recovered any kind of health given the recent predictions of his imminent death, but It was Melody who first noticed the signs that he seemed to be getting younger.

“Pops, you seem to be growing hair on your bald patches,” she remarked only a week after he was discharged from hospital. He could see it – fine white hair on the sides of his forehead, growing faster than whiskers. Come to think of that – what whiskers? He now seemed to have a bald chin and cheeks.

“Is this a side-effect? Should we report it to Dr. Lambert?” Melody asked.

“He was talking about negative side-effects,” John said. “I don’t think growing back hair at my age is a negative – do you?”

John did not even bring it to the attention of the doctor when he went in the following week, and even though it seemed substantial growth by then, Dr. Lambert did not notice it. He was more concerned with the blood test results and the vital signs.

“You heart seems very strong, and the oxygen in your blood is excellent. How do you feel?”

“Better than before the procedure.” John understated things. He felt great. He felt fitter and stronger than he had for years, and even noticed some flexibility returning. His joints seemed to be moving freely. Getting up from a deep sofa no longer presented an effort.

“Just enjoy your extra time,” said Dr. Lambert. “Stay in touch. We are still assessing things. When things start to go backwards, we will need to know.”

“Backwards?” John was now concerned.

“We have used this procedure on others and initial positive results don’t seem to last,” said Dr. Lambert. “As I said, it can buy time, and for you it already has.”

When he left the hospital, John was determined to make the most of the new vigor that had seeming dropped out of nowhere. He started to go for long walks. He had previously been largely housebound, and attended to by family – mainly Melody. Now he was ready to get out.

It was not until he started walking, and walking briskly, then even breaking into a jog, that John Garside started to realize that his chest was wobbling. It concerned him enough to subject his body to some close examination when he got home.

There was no doubt about it. John was developing breasts. He had a close look at his face in the mirror. His liver spots seemed to have disappeared. His face had once been wrinkled but his recent illness had seen his skin stretch across the bones of his face as if it was only a fine film, but no it appeared plump and soft. It was still the face of an old man, or so it seemed, but somehow younger.

He pushed the hair away from the side of his face. It was white, but soft and still growing in places where it had not existed for years. And now he had breasts – small mounds like pre-adolescent girl. A girl. It suddenly dawned on him. He was becoming female.

How was it possible? After all these years, it seemed that a wish was to come true. It had been a fervent prayer when he was young and when he believed in prayer. He had fallen asleep with tears on his pillow begging to wake up as a girl. But such foolishness had to be put to one side.

Now in a seeming cruel twist of fate, in his dying weeks or months, he was to be given a short time in a body that might have been the body of a woman.

It was not only him that noticed. Others in the family saw him regaining some health, but of course it was Melody who saw much more.

“Are you sure we shouldn’t report these side effects, Pops? I mean, you look different. Not just younger, but different.”

“It is that little bit of you coming to the surface,” he said. “Your tissue had given me a little more life, but obviously it is stronger and more vigorous that a sick old man, so it is taking over.”

It was intended as a joke, and a message of thanks, but the moment it was said, the both of them seemed to understand that it just might just be true. They looked at one another just for a moment and nodded. It was like twins confirming that yes, they have exactly the same thought in their heads and just need it confirmed without saying it.

“I would happily be like you, Darling Girl,” said John.

“But not a woman?” That seemed to Melody to be just too weird.

John sighed. Now was as good a time to say what he had never said in a lifetime. “Actually, I would love to be a woman. I am too old now to enjoy such a life, but if I had been a woman at your age, I would have gladly lived a woman’s life.”

Melody smiled. “Maybe you are getting younger, Pops? Maybe we will in a few years time we will go clubbing together? Or maybe it will only be a few months.”

“Well, maybe we can go for a walk in the park together on Sunday,” said John. “I could be your grandmother for the day, or I might even get away with being your aunt? That is if you could find me something feminine to wear.”

Melody looked at her grandparent quizzically, as if to check that this was not a joke. But she knew it wasn’t. Still there was a mischievous look that appealed to her. It was going to be something that they could share. Nobody else need know.

Still, John marveled that other members of his family seemed only to notice that his health and mood had improved, without noticing other changes in his appearance. He wondered if they really paid much attention to him at all.

Melody had found a suitable dress, and shoes and a hat as well. She had bought these items with her own money and John was happy to pay her back.

“I have also booked you in at the salon on Saturday,” said Melody. “You have enough hair to do something with”.

“You will need to come with me,” said John. “It will be my treat. I have barely set foot inside a salon my whole life. I will need you with me.”

John counted down the days. It seemed as if his whole life had flown by in a flash and yet every day until he realized his dream of presenting in public dressed as a woman, seemed like a lifetime of its own.

But then they walked into the salon, with him in his dress and shoes and legs shaved smooth.

“My niece and I have a function tonight and a garden party tomorrow,” said John, in a female voice that seemed to flow easily from his lips. “We want to look as good as we can. It will be easy for Melody, but not so easy for me.”

What is your name?” the lady asked.

“Joan,” was the name returned. Melody nodded approvingly.

Joan and Melody had their hair styled, their nails painted and makeup done. The makeup artist also suggested a slightly different look for the following day, and had some ideas for the colors of a more suitable outfit. Joan resolved that they would shop for that immediately.

“Why did you talk about going out tonight, Aunty Joan?” grinned Melody. “Here we are all dressed up and nowhere to go.”

“Well, the salon is not open tomorrow and I did not want my new pixies cut hair style to go to waste,” said Joan. “So we had better find somewhere to go tonight. I would suggest the golf club. I used to be a member but I got too old and it is too expensive anyway. But there are lots of older men there, and young ones too.”

“Aunty Joan!” Melody liked to use the name. “It is one thing to reveal that you like to wear women’s clothing, but are you telling me that you are interested in men as well?”

“Sweetheart, you don’t go to all the expense of looking this good without going fishing for compliments,” said Joan. “We will go to the golf club and tell them that we are guests of a current member that I know will not be there. We will sit at the bar and be admired as the classy women we are.”

So they headed off. Joan pulled the cover off the Boxter than had not been driven in years, but it sparked into life and took them to the gold club in less than 20 minutes

“You seem to be a natural at this,” said Melody. “I am worried that you might be leading me astray”.

“You have to understand that I feel that I have a new chance at life,” said Joan. “I don’t know how long I have, but I know that I want to spend it like this, as a woman. And I owe it all to you, Darling Girl. All I ask is a couple of days being beside me and then I will strike out on my own, if you like.”

The last few golfers were coming in from the course and a few who were there only to play the 19th turned up as well. Joan had bought the first glass of champagne for each of them, but after that there were gentlemen who were happy to buy for the ladies.

“We have been stood up,” explained Joan. “Given the age of my date I am not surprised, but he was bringing his grandson to escort my niece so we are both disappointed.”

But then it seemed as if fate intervened to make good. A handsome older man appeared with his young business colleague. He said – “Please forgive my intrusion, but I have heard that you ladies have been wronged this evening, and I wanted to volunteer myself and my young associate to offer our arms as escorts tonight, if that appeals”.

Joan and Melody looked at one another and were agreed. They were told that night that they seemed closer than aunt and niece. Joan looked like an older version of Melody, and Melody looked like a younger version of Joan. It seemed that they were made of the same stuff, which in a manner of speaking, they were.

The question may well be - what happened to John Garside. It might be said, as has already been suggested, that he died in hospital shortly after the tissue transplant. It is true that from that day his future was no more – the person who came through that ordeal was destined to become someone else. But it was some weeks before Joan fully appeared, and she was to blossom over the coming weeks.

But do not think that this was a true miracle. A little surgery was needed for her to achieve her childhood dream, but she did get there. She never got to go clubbing with Melody, but then why would she? She never acquired youth, but she never wanted that. She just wanted to live as a woman and maybe even die a woman, but she is not dead yet.

Has she found by accident and just the right compatible tissue, the cure for death? No, but she has found that life is a cure in itself. While you live, you dream. Even if there is life after death, it is a life without dreams. And sometimes, given modern medicine and the perfect donor, dreams might just come true.

The End

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Erin’s seed: “A guy was a crossdresser when young but stopped in high school when he got big and bulky. But now he's old and facing death from some sort of viral cancer - his only hope is that they replace his body piece by piece using donated tissue … his granddaughter is a good match, they can grow tissue from sample of hers. Slowly his body change as he becomes in effect, a clone of his granddaughter. Everyone is surprised as he adapts quite well …”.

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