My Bullet

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

They told me that they could not remove it. They said that I would have to live with it. My bullet

“It is too deeply embedded for us to remove,” the surgeon said. “We are getting high levels of brain function and your motor functions seems unaffected, so the risk involved in extraction seems unjustified. There is no infection. We will just leave it.” My bullet.

I remember that Sonia was there at my bedside. She squeezed my hand.

“Todd, you’re going to be Okay. Maybe the wedding will need to be delayed a bit, but never mind. You will be back on your feet. Nothing has changed.”

But somehow, I felt that something had. I could not quite put my finger on what or how, but something was very different. When I looked at her face, it was just as it always was, but somehow the light that always seemed to be shining on it was gone. It took me a while to understand it.

Captain Monigatti came to visit too.

“We are gonna get these bastards, Todd,” he said. “We have your description of the shooter and his associates. We will find them.”

Somehow the captain looked different to. I noticed that his face was lopsided. I had never seen that before. Everybody’s face looked different. And bodies too. Young Doctor Travis John Lowell had a great body. Why would I take notice, or remember his name?

Everything seemed different. But the bullet hole had healed, and I was the same. Just with a little something extra – my bullet.

Sonia and I had been high school sweethearts. The captain of the baseball team and the homecoming queen. I remember the prom and just how good she looked. Somehow my recollection of what she was wearing seemed even sharper – even clearer than our first night of sex.

And after we left school and my short time at college before I joined the police. I could remember the way I felt about her. When that had changed was harder to understand. Was it before I was gunned down on the job?

I remember that too. Somebody pushed me to my knees and the man with the gun stood over and fired and I bowed my head to pray – not because I believed but because I thought he might. I never felt my bullet, but they showed it to me in the X-ray image. It drilled a clean hole top left and passed between the hemispheres of my brain, somehow slowed enough just to stop in the right temporal lobe. Being sterilized by the heat of the charge, it carried no other foreign matter. The surgeons removed and larger section of skill and fished out bone fragments from the top of the frontal lobe and screwed in at titanium plate and stitched me up.

I asked if I was going to be alright. The surgeon said – “If you are asking, that is a good sign.”

The man with the gun. I remembered him. As soon as I was conscious, I gave the description of him and the others, and the address of the warehouse where it happened. It was a routine check. A disturbance called in. It was Pedro and me. Pedro was not so lucky.

“We don’t truly understand the workings of the brain,” the surgeon said. “The temporal lobe governs language, memory and emotion, and some sexual responses. It seems completely unaffected. You language is fine, your memory excellent and the tears this morning show emotion is still intact.”

Those tears were hardly me. It was nothing. It was just my mother getting weepy and it set me off somehow. She was as surprised as I was.

It seemed that I was different, and I just did not understand what had changed. It was not until the day that I was being discharged that it hit me. I went to get myself dressed. While I was lying in bed I had everything done for me, but when I went to the bathroom on my own, walking a little unsteadily at first and I looked in the mirror and saw myself, I was horrified.

It was me alright, but I was disgusting.

A man was looking back at me, and that fact seemed so wrong, but the hard features and the hair on the chin. I had never thought of myself as ugly before, but now I did. I wanted to look like Sonia, not this.

It seemed as if I had been overcome with some madness. Of course I assumed that it something to do with my brain injury. It was just that I was minutes away from walking out of that place, and so I didn’t want to say – “There is something wrong with me”. I just wanted to leave and then revisit at the outpatient clinic scheduled a couple of days later.

There was a part of me that thought I could shake it off and that life would go on, but it was like my bullet. It was stuck in my brain.

Sonia suggested that I rest, but I told her that I needed to exercise my brain first, and then work on my body. TV was not going to do the job. There were things to read, but it was all her stuff. I believed in work, and sure – I watched TV. It just seemed like a box of flashing lights now.

I read her magazines. She had plenty. She never seemed to throw any out – she just stacked them in the cupboard under the stairs. But each magazine seemed to be a treasure trove of new things. I had never had any thought for them before. There were all kinds of helpful hints, and there were things to do as well. I thought of them as things that I could do while I was at home. I had been told that exercise should be confined to walking for a few weeks until blood vessels in my brain had recovered.

But the first thing that I felt I needed to do was to get rid of body hair. Don’t ask me where the idea came from. I think that it was before I read the recipe for “make your own sugar wax” in one of those magazines.

Sonia was confused, and so was I, to some extent.

“It just feels better,” I said. “Now I just need some body cream to settle the inflammation.”

Eyebrows require special care, though. You need to decide what is the right shape – who knew there were so many? It depends on your face shape, and what style you are looking for. I decided that I needed to know a lot more before I made that decision.

I realized that everything in the apartment that belonged to me I did not like, or it seemed irrelevant. Sports equipment and tools seemed totally useless now. Things of Sonia’s that she rarely touched suddenly seemed interesting – things like her sewing machine and box of patterns, and her knitting box. Her mother had been a real homebody and she had picked up stuff when her mother went into a home, telling me that she would one day go back to what her mother taught her. But she was busy with work. It seemed to me that these things might be just what I needed – occupational therapy without leaving the home or putting myself under stress.

There were ideas in the magazines. There was some fabric and yarn, and even materials that might look dowdy or old-fashioned can be turned into something modern and even edgy with good handiwork. It seemed like the kind of challenge I needed.

Sonia told me that I was behaving weirdly, and that I should discuss it at the outpatient’s clinic. I did mention it. The therapist attending to me did not seem perturbed.

“I know how difficult it is for men to find things to occupy themselves at this stage in the process,” she said. “How resourceful of you. There is nothing wrong with men knitting or sewing. Maybe if you are making a shirt or something you can wear it to your next session.”

But I was not making shirts. The magazines did not include shirts. The patterns were for much prettier things.

“I just want to say that I find your recover is amazing,” the therapist continued. “You have a bullet in your brain, but it seems that you are fully recovered from the surgery. Your brain and motor function are excellent. I will get the doctor to sign off for a return to work in a few weeks.”

I realized that I was a little uncertain about returning to work. Ambivalent is the word – I did not care one way or the other. I just knew that I did not want to wear those clothes – not anymore. The magazines had introduced me to a world of beautiful things and returning to a world of dull ugliness did not seem to be something that I wanted to do.

Short hair is ugly. I suppose some girls can get away with a short hairstyle. It just seemed wrong for me. The mere mention of the phrase “some girls” should have set off flashing lights. I was not a girl, so why would I even think like that? It was identifying myself as something I was not. Somehow it just did not register. It was like my bullet was blocking a pathway in my brain.

But at least I could get it colored. I went to the salon to get it done. They welcomed me with open arms. It was like a place where they were not trying to analyze me. Their only concern was beauty, and that is what was driving me too. It seemed like a place that I should visit as often as possible.

They talked about a pixie cut with length in the front so that I could grow my hair out. After the repair to my skull my scalp had been pulled forward to give me a good hairline that I needed to show. But in the meantime, why not go red? It seemed like a good idea.

Sonia was horrified. She called Dr. Lowell. He asked to speak to me.

“I am fine,” I said to him. “I am going back to work next week, and I am ready. But I think that people need to understand that I might be different, so is there any harm in presenting myself differently?”

What could the doctor say? He asked me the usual brain function questions which I answered appropriately. He never saw what I looked like or how I was dressed, so he assured Sonia that he and the other hospital staff who had seen me were happy for me to go to work and report back later.

I have to say that while I was on the phone I had a dreamy image of Dr. Howell on the other end, with an earnest expression on his face, and no shirt on. It really did make me feel slightly flushed.

I decided to wear a dress on my first day back. Sonia tried to lay out something a bit more gender neutral, because she was not unaware of my intentions, but I was not keen on any of that.

“Where did you buy this?” she asked. “It looks familiar.”

“I made it,” I said. “It was some fabric that you were going to throw out and a pattern I found. I am really quite proud of it. But it really would look much better if I had the body to show it off.”

And that was what was wrong with me. I knew it at that moment. It was as if my bullet was a radio transmitter, beeping out a message from deep inside my brain. The message was simple - This is not your body. Nothing that you are doing or thinking is wrong. The only thing wrong is your body. It is the body of a man, and it shouldn’t be.

I could get a woman’s haircut, paint my eyes and lips, put on a dress. It might help, but it was not the answer. It might do for now, but …

“What is going on?” Sonia was clearly distressed. “What you are doing is crazy. You are dressing up like a woman, but you are a man.”

“You are right,” I said. “I need to fix this. I simply cannot be a man anymore.”

She said that it was my bullet. She said that before all of this I was a normal man with no feminine inclinations at all, but she would say that. I know what she wants me to be, but I am not that person. I found that I no longer trusted Sonia, and a marriage is based on trust.

But I started to wonder why I had married her. She was not somebody whom I found to be attractive. I remembered our times together well enough, but I found that I could not remember ever having had sex with her. Frankly I was not unhappy about that. She said sex was great, when we had it, but if it was so good, why couldn’t I fully remember just one incidence?

Sonia demanded that I make an appointment at the hospital. I did. I called Dr. Howell’s nurse. I would go there after work on Monday. He wanted to see how things went and so that seemed a good idea.

I went online and researched hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery. It was definitely what I wanted. I thought it best not to discuss it with Sonia as she was a bit depressed.

I went to work on Monday dressed as a woman, with my new dress and bright red hair and makeup, and a touch of perfume. I even bought some nice shoes with just a little bit of heel. I felt great. I just used my access card to get up to “Investigations” and then I just breezed into a room of open mouths. I looked around, and I was OK with it. There was a WTF mumble that seemed to wash across all the desks.

“Good morning,” I said in a practised feminine tone. I went straight over to my desk. There was a big “Welcome Back” card on it. It was full of kind words. It made me slightly tearful to know that I had such support.

“Is this how you are now?” somebody asked me. “We heard you had a brain injury?”

“My brain is fully healed,” I said. “What I realize now is that before it was all a bit fuzzy. Then it was as if something had penetrated my mind and opened up my thinking. I know now that I have found the real me, and this is it.” I gave a little twirl. The dress was falling perfectly. I was so pleased with myself.

There were lots of questions, and I did not have all the answers, but the general feeling was that they were happy that I had survived and that instead of being impaired in some way, I was happy – happier than I had been before my bullet opened up my thinking.

Captain Monigatti stood watching, then he called me into his office.

“We have a policy on dealing with transgender officers,” he said. “I just wish you had given me some prior warning.”

“It must be that I can’t have been ready before the shooting,” I said. “But it feels that I have always felt this way. So I am still me. I am still the detective that I was.”

“And you are a good one,” Captain Monigatti said. “To be honest, some of the others are not up to scratch. I missed you in here.”

It felt like the first compliment that I had received since I got out of the hospital. I would have preferred – “you look wonderful in that dress” but I suppose in these “Me Too” times no man can say such things. How sad. A girl has to take any compliment she receives and give a little shy thank-you-smile back. The Captain moved a little in his seat. I felt warm.

“We still have a job to get those guys who shot you,” he said. I have a new guy on board up from uniform. Would you be happy to take him on?” I just shrugged. He was the boss.

He was called in. Greg Harding was his name. He was a good-looking guy and looked pretty tough. I guessed I needed that. I was hardly looking tough these days. Quite the opposite.

“Sorry Boss, I thought that I was going to be partnered up with this guy Todd?” He seemed to be completely ignoring me, like I was a secretary there to take notes.

“Do you still go by Todd?” the Captain asked me. “Somehow it doesn’t seem that appropriate.”

Greg was looking at me and Captain Monigatti like his head was on a swivel.

“You’re right, Captain. I think I’ll go with … Tania. There is a T on my credit card.” I turned to Greg and said – “Welcome to investigations. I am Tania.”

“So you are … you were …?” He looked confused and troubled. I felt cool and in control.

“Tania,” I repeated. “We have met before, have we? No. Tania is my name.”

He finally took my outstretched hand, but still appeared puzzled. I sat him down at his desk and brought up the file on his screen, leaning over him so that he could smell my scent. I wished that I had a pair of breasts that I could dangle beside his face as I worked the mouse. It was something that I needed to get on to.

Some others were looking on, still finding my appearance hard to accept, but slowly they got about their business and left us to ours.

“This is the crime scene location, so if you are ready, I am happy to go back and look around,” I said.

“The land deeds show that the owner of the building is this corporation,” said Greg, at last responding to the demands of the job. “The owners are bare nominees, but we can guess that it is a criminal front.”

“Look for other buildings they own,” I said. “The place where it happened will be too hot to be active, but whatever business they were doing will be going on somewhere else. Look for other corporations with the same nominees that own property in the city. I will go through the mug shots again.”

That is police work – sitting at a screen going through data and recording anything that sticks out. The file had records of CCTV and interviews with people living nearby who may have heard shots or screams. There was nothing. Mug shots I had looked at in the hospital, but I hoped that if I went through them again I might find something. I didn’t.

Greg came over with the addresses of a few buildings to look at.

“What is the plan?” he asked.

“We just stop at each one for an hour and assess what is going on. Maybe we might get lucky and find probable cause to go inside, or maybe doubly lucky if I see somebody I recognize from the shooting. It is not much of a plan, I know, but while I have been recuperating the fresh trail has gone cold. We need to look for a fresh start.”

“People told me you were good,” he said. “I mean Todd was good … so I guess …”.

“Stop right there,” I told him. Then I did something I had never done before. I tossed him the keys to the car. I took the passenger seat. I could use the vanity mirror and just gaze out at the city rushing past the window.

I just sat there wishing that I had no male genitals between my legs. With a man behind the wheel and me sitting there in a pretty dress, it just seemed so wrong that I should have this awful anomaly in my crotch. I resolved that I needed to take some steps. Hormones I could obtain. I had an informant who dealt in illicit hormones and who was ignored so long as he assisted with information on narcotics trafficking. His name was Miguel but everybody called his Mickey, and sometimes “Mickey the Mouse”.

As it happened one of the buildings was near where my informant did business. I told Greg to drop me at a coffee shop so I could pick up stake out supplies, and before I bought those, I called Mickey to meet me there.

“Do I know you?” he said.

“The old me, yes,” I said. “I used to be Todd, but as you can see, I am working on being somebody else. I need hormones.”

“I can help,” he said. “You look surprisingly good. Are you still with the police? Are you going to stay in the force?”

“Yes, I am. I go by Tania these days. I have the same number. I am still looking for information and I expect you to continue to supply it. We have turned a blind eye to your activities.”

“But you will be a customer now,” Mickey smirked.

“Be careful. You are not the only supplier.”

“Shots, pills patches or suppositories?” he asked.

“Whichever gives me breasts first” I said, with a steely glare.

A short time later I left the coffee shop with coffee and donuts and other items.

As I walked towards the building where Greg would have parked I was suddenly aware that men were looking at me. Initially I found that pleasing, but the problem with being in law enforcement is knowing just how vulnerable a woman alone can be. My spell in hospital had weakened me. Could I take on an attacker? And I had already taken the intramuscular shot and applied patches under my nipples – how much weaker would I be?

I was relieved to see the car.

“You have been a while,” said Greg, reaching out for the coffee he had specified.

“I was just dealing with some other stuff,” I said. “Anything going on here?”

There was nothing going on. Not there or any of the other places we visited that day. But that is policework. The crucial first couple of days after my shooting was months before, so now it was a question of looking and waiting, and perhaps hoping for a tip off.

When I went home that night, I told Sonia that I was on hormones. After the initial injection I was on patches and I would be inserting suppositories and getting used to using my butthole. She was horrified. There was a scene. She said that she could see that I was going to do nothing about it. She has contacted my medical team behind my back and she was furious to report – “Because there is no history of damage to the frontal lobe causing it, we cannot be sure that any gender dysphoria was not existing before the brain injury.” It seemed to me that this must be true, but I just had no memory of feeling this way before.

“For whatever reason I am a woman,” I told her. “And I am sorry, Sonia, but I don’t think that I am a lesbian.”

“So you are on the hunt of a man now, are you? You and your dyed hair and short dress!”

“I will sleep in the spare room until I can find a new place,” I said.

She burst into tears. I did too. It seemed to be the way I was. We found one another and embraced, but I think that we both knew that it was two women hugging and supporting one another.

Greg picked me up from outside my apartment complex as arranged in the morning. I was wearing something new. I had bought a bra that was designed to turn the smallest feminine chest flab into a viewable cleavage, and with padding I wanted to show it off. I had barely started with the hormones but there was something going on, and I come feel it coursing through me. It seemed that I might be on heat, if that applies to humans.

I smiled at Greg as I dropped my softening butt onto the car seat. I could see him stare at my chest. I ignored it but it thrilled me. I felt seen as a woman and desired, perhaps for the first time.

He gulped before he asked – “Are we going to do another round of the buildings?”

“Just a couple,” I said. “But we have other cases. This case is dangerously close to going cold.”

“There is something different about you today,” said Greg. “I hope that you won’t take any offence in me saying that, what with you being …”.

What Greg? A woman? Transgendered? I kept silent for a while to let him finish if he could.

“I am developing my breasts,” I said, finally. I am on hormones, and I am massaging in creams to allow the skin to stretch. You have permission to comment if you like.” It seemed that I had nobody else who might.

“They look great,” he said. An awkward pause followed. “To be honest I thought that I would have trouble accepting you as a woman, Tania, but I was wrong. This has to be your true self. And now with the shape to match … I think that you make a hot woman.”

“Thanks Greg,” I said. “That means a lot. You will never understand how much that means.”

“I don’t want things to get weird between for me saying it,” he said.

“It won’t,” I assured him. But it was a lie. I wanted to jump him then and there. I just had to hold myself in check. I was man-hungry, and suddenly Greg seemed like a Greek god.

Fortunately a call on my cell phone diverted me. I answered.

“Hey, is that the sexy Tania?” It was Mickey the Mouse.

“That’s me,” I said, in keeping with my suden total lack of professionalism. I pulled myself together and asked – “What have you got for me?”

“An address and a time,” said Mickey. “I think that this is the guy you are looking for. The guy who shot you in the head.”

“Give it to me,” I said curtly. I pulled out my old-fashioned notebook and jotted down the details before hanging up.

“What have we got?” said Greg.

“A tip off. Do you mind working late tonight?”

It seemed a good enough reason to go back to the station and pick up a couple of other investigations under way. But I took a vehicle over the lunch hour to investigate the address. I had an idea in my head that this could be a direct showdown with the shooter, backed only by Greg, but I am not that kind of police officer. I told Captain Monigatti.

“We will have back up, and maybe you need to stand back from the front line on this. We need you to identify the offender. We can’t put a witness in harm’s way.”

“You can forget that Captain,” I said to him as directly as I could. “I will not take risks, but I want to confront this guy.”

“Fair enough, Tania,” he said. “We all respect you here. We know that you are carrying a bullet in your head, but here you are doing quality work.”

Yes. My bullet. Now not the only thing added to me. Captain Monigatti was eying my tits while doing his best not to.

“You had best get yourself round to the armory to be fully kitted out” he said. “We are going in heavy.”

It seemed like I was so different from everybody else in the back of the van. I was only weeks into hormones but I felt weak and feminine, and the complete opposite of all the testosterone charged males sitting with me. I had found a bandana to tie my hair back, but I could not resist freshening my mascara. This was going to be an important moment for me ad I was not about to face it not looking good.

We arrived at the building. Other officers including Greg had checked escape points and had taken up positions, but the frontal assault would be by us, in full tactical gear. It was just that I would be at the back – not because I was a woman (as I was becoming) but because I was a witness.

These things always happen quickly. The front line piles out; snipers take positions, the bullhorn call is made, and the battering ram crashes in – more that once as this door was reinforced. There was gunfire, returned by our team using automatic weapons. I followed up the rear with adrenalin high.

There were bodies on the ground. Some might be dead, but others were lying face down with hands and feet bound with ties, immobilised with efficiency.

“This one?” said one of the officers, looking at me and pulling the man’s head up to reveal his face.

I shook my head. He moved to the next.

“That’s him,” I said.

“Up on your knees, you prick,” said the officer dragging him to face me.

“I suppose you don’t recognize me,” I said to him. To give emphasis I took off my CT helmet and the bandana and shook out my red curls.

“Well, you have changed a lot, but I recognize you,” the man said, with surprising calmness and clarity. It was how he was that day too. “The fact is that when I saw those pretty girl eyes looking at me, I could not shoot you in the face like your buddy. I had to turn you around and shoot from the top. How did you not die?”

“I hope you are recording this on your body cam, Captain,” I said. He nodded. It was a confession to murder.

I drew a little closer and said - “In a sort of way, I did die that day, but in my case you can only get charged with attempted murder. But for murdering Pedro and admitting it, you are in line ti face the death penalty.”

“I have a feeling I will be dreaming of you until that day,” he said, with the bravado that often comes out a time like this. I could not resist giving him a teasing wink just to show that I was unphased.

You imagine this moment and how satisfying it will be to face you killer and whisper “You failed – I live”, but it was curiously hollow. What interested me more was that this man had seen a woman in me where nobody else had. As they lead him away, I just felt exhausted – the down after the adrenalin rush.

“Leave the gear in the van, Tania,” said Captain Monigatti. “You have done a great job. Greg can take you home.”

Greg was there, smiling. I dumped my tactical gear and put on some disposable overalls.

“You must be pleased,” said Greg. “We got the guy.”

I just stared out the window. What had changed? My bullet was still there.

As we drew near to my apartment block I saw three large suitcases inside the gate.

“Oh my God! What day is it today? Sonia told me that she would pack up my stuff and change the locks. Today of all days!”

“It’s late,” said Greg. “I’ll put the suitcases in the back and you can stay at my place for a few days until you sort things out.”

“That would be great. I am sorry to put you to this trouble.”

“Hey, don’t let it ruin an otherwise good day,” said Greg. He reached out and squeezed my hand. His touch was warm and welcome, and there was a slight sizzle of electricity in it.

I have metal in my head. I am not talking about the plate repairing my skull, but about my bullet. Sometimes it seems like a lightning rod. When Greg makes love to me it seems to crackle with the power he can produce. I have learned to love my bullet.

The End

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