Karma

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

People like me get used to casual racism. We learn to just nod and get on with it. Asian people are never threatening, or that seems to be what European people think. Many are small like me with poorly developed muscles and have little facial hair. Sometimes it seems as if Europeans think of us as childlike because of it. Certainly nobody expects us to react with anger.

There is also the way we were brought up. Although I was born in America, my family might still say that we are Buddhist. Central to this faith is karma – the belief that the sum total of the good and bad that you have done in this world follows you throughout this life, and the next, through the process of reincarnation. Buddhists strive for a peaceful life by doing no bad thing. We just roll over.

People have said that it might be worse for me because I have “pretty eyes”. It is not my opinion. I have the eyes that I am born with. Other people call them pretty. I used to get it all the time: “You would make a very pretty woman.” So, what do I do about that? Nothing, because that is what we Asians do.

A lot of racism is based on stupidity. We can just laugh at that in private. Stupid people can be funny. But the worst thing about racism is when it disadvantages you. Like at work when you get passed over again and again in favor of European people. It seems like white bosses don’t think that Asians are ambitious, or that we are too passive to be good bosses, or maybe we are just never going to complain. So, do I complain? No, because that is not what we do.

Some of my Asian friends said that even white women do better. It seems like an awful thing to say, but in Asian cultures women are at a disadvantage. They are seen as not being focused on careers because childbirth breaks the promotional sequence. Western culture is the same, but they like to deny it. But it seems that Asian people suffer more for their race than their sex.

My family are from Thailand. It is a different culture in many ways. Like other Asian languages Thai has no gender specific pronouns like he and she, but unlike other Asian languages it has sex specific endings in conversation. That means that a woman speaks a slightly different dialect from a man. Some men choose to do that, which means that they identify as a woman. In Thailand this has come to mean that gender is a choice.

People might say that with people like the ladyboys of Thailand there are more transgender people in Thailand than other places, but I don’t think that is true. It is just easier to choose because our language asks you to affirm your gender when you open your mouth.

It is also true that while Thai society may look down of women and on kathoey (loosely meaning transwomen) some layboys are very successful. I have heard of parents who might take a pretty boy and put him on hormones in childhood so that he can seek his fortune as a ladyboy when he comes of age. Pretty boys like me. They can be an asset to a family. Make money and then return home and care for their parents and other members of their extended family because they can have no family of their own. This is the way for some in Thailand, but not for Thais in America.

As far as I was concerned, I was not kathoey, but for all that was happening to me I might as well have been. Except that I was not even being as successful as many of them were. In fact, I was getting nowhere.

Then there was an incident at work. My immediate boss made a pass at me. He said something like: “With that man-bun of yours why don’t you just put on a dress for me tomorrow”.

I was so disgusted that I decided that I needed to do something. I went to see an employment lawyer. He told me this would be sexual harassment if I were a woman, or even a transwoman, or if the man making the suggestion were gay, but a man talking to another may about clothing was not actionable.

“Making remarks about somebody’s appearance does not give rise to a cause of action unless it is sexual or racial, and on the face of it, this is neither,” the Lawyer said. “And maybe you could be described as being pretty?”

It was like the last straw. But to calm me down he suggested that if sexism was endemic in the organization maybe I should see if there was anybody within the company who could catch the offenders in the act. They could record what happened and that would enable him to sue that company and maybe my own claim could then be included as part of a class action.

I asked him: “What about racism?”

“Racism is a crusade. They will have to deny it. You might get publicity but you will get no money. Sexism gets paid off. You will get cash and I will get a fee. I don’t really like doing racism claims”.

“The problem is that I cannot think of anybody pretty enough to get sexually propositioned,” I said.

“Excluding yourself, of course,” he said.

That was when it struck me. Maybe I could do something. I had pretty eyes. Everybody knows about ladyboys and how sexy they are.

I decided to seek a transfer within the company but to try changing gender. The paperwork seemed simple enough. Just tick a different box. My given name was Wittaya and everybody called me “Witt” which I always thought sounded American. I could use the same name but tick “F” and sign myself off as “Taya”.

You may think that this idea is completely ridiculous. How could I pass myself off as a woman? But maybe all I had to do was pass myself off as a transwoman? That could still mean that harassment would be considered sexual. As I had learned, that is where the money is. But what I decided to do was to do my best to pretend to be a real (born) woman first. I suppose that it was just to see whether I could. My fall back position could always be: “Yes, I’m trans”.

I actually knew of a Thai Ladyboy living nearby. The Thai community is not large in our city, so I could look her up. She worked in a strip club as trans, but she lived 24/7 as a woman. I asked her to help.

I got the transfer so that Taya was due to start on the following Monday, so I took Friday off to give us three clear days to complete the transformation and the training.

Given my description of myself you can guess that the transformation was surprisingly simple. My hair was long enough to be cut into a simple bob that was unmistakably feminine, and I could grow my hair from that if I wanted to. Far harder was the training in feminine demeanor and the voice, but a few days later my kathoey friend pronounced me sufficiently skilled after our evening in public on Sunday night. She said that it would be a learning process with every day, but the best way to achieve success was total immersion, which is exactly what I would be doing. No taking off my female form when I got home. If I wanted to be a woman it would have to be like my new friend – 24/7.

When I started my new position at the company, I was very uncertain of myself, so I came across as shy and a little insular. But I was the only Asian person in the office in this division and I guess other people often think of Asians as shy and insular. I had one older woman who was very welcoming. Her name was Claudia.

I often wondered if she might have known that I was a man in women’s clothing, but she never said anything. If she knew then maybe she figured that if I was trans it was my right to keep it to myself. Or maybe she didn’t know?

We had coffee together and we talked about clothes and TV shows that I should watch, and we talked about the sexual predators that seemed to predominate in the company we worked for.

“They ignore me,” said Claudia. “If there is one good thing about getting older, it is that. But you need to look out. There is a macho culture in this place. Pretty girls like you are just prey for these wild beasts.”

I was getting looks, but I was not replying to approaches and just walking away. It was not how I intended things to work – I was supposed to be laying a trap – but I was just worried that I would be found out.

Two things changed me. The first was that Claudia changed my interests. She had me watching TV shows and reading magazine and websites so that we could talk about things that interested her – feminine things. I got into these things. I talked about changing my hair and she was very keen, and getting the extensions (as my kathoey friend suggested) changed everything. A bob is just one style, but longer hair means that you can have plenty of different styles and use hair ornaments too, if you like.

I had no breasts, but plenty of Asian women are flat chested. I had male genitals, but to be honest they were never big, and being tucked away most of the day seemed to make them even smaller.

With my new hair drawn off my face I needed to pay more attention to makeup. I had good eyes that were large and quite round as for many Thai people, and I had learned some makeup tips that could make these look great. I had pronounced lips on a small mouth as many Thais, men and women, have. Good choices in lipstick is the answer there. My face was largely hairless, and completely so with effort, and in a good condition only enhanced with a proper skincare regimen.

The second thing was hormones. My kathoey friend said that hormones can do wonders for your skin. It sounds crazy that I would simply agree that taking these powerful drugs was a good idea, but I guess that I got a little caught up in the whole feminine thing, and it seemed like estrogen was something missing in this life I had constructed.

With great hair and makeup men paid more attention to me. The harassment started in earnest. I started recording.

But then I got promoted. I suppose it started like a classic harassment situation. I walked into the office of Leo Kennard, a senior manager with some of my work signed off by my supervisor. This guy leered at me, but just as I thought he was going to say something the pages caught his eye and he started reading.

“Can you stay and wait for my reply?” he asked me. “This is urgent.” He read some more and then said: “This is not his work. What is this reference? Did you write this? It is very well researched. You seem to have your finger on this. What was your name again?”

I could feel his eyes on my butt as I walked out, but the fact is that I had left his office without a suggestive word being said. Then a few days later I was called up to the office of Mr. Kennard and given my supervisor’s job. He had been moved sideways. I had been promoted!

Claudia told me that he (my ex-supervisor) had put the word around that to get my promotion I had gone to bed with Leo Kennard! She said that this is the way women are treated. Men, especially disgruntled me, never accept that women advance on merit.

I went to see my lawyer as he had called me to ask how I was getting on.

When I walked into his office and told him who I was, he nearly fell off his chair.

“Now we are talking,” he said. “Men dream about the woman you look like. Tell me what you have for me”.

“I am getting plenty of comments on my appearance, and this place is a den of sexism”, I told him. “But I have been promoted”. He sounded disappointed. What I did not tell him was that I was becoming increasingly immune to the comments about how sexy I looked. In fact, it had got to the point that I could be disappointed if there were no comments.

I started to wonder if my role was to hold these awful to account. I mean, if karma is a thing, then it will happen to them. Would it be a bad deed to trick these people by gathering secret evidence against them.

My lawyer said that Leo Kennard as my direct superior should be my target. He had special responsibility, and if he was harassing me that would “be a winner”. But is staring at me with desire harassment? Others at my own level or even lower were more blunt. My lawyer said that Leo and the whole corporation had a duty to protect me from sexual harassment. I just needed evidence.

It was just that my priorities seemed to have changed. I was busy with a more senior job and I had plenty to do, and being a woman is busier than life is for men. I mean shopping takes longer, and hair and makeup, and we girls talk as we do our job. We are more about relationships than transactions.

I then I found a folder on my desk from Leo. It was a brochure on breast implants. I started my recorder and I went to see him. I put the folder down on his desk.

“Did you open it?” he asked. “The fact is that I don’t know quite how to ask somebody special in my life whether she would consider me paying to change her figure a little to please me.”

“Oh”, I said. “I might be the wrong person to ask.” After all, I was a man. I was aware that he was a divorced man and I had no idea that there was another women in his life. “It could be difficult”.

“There is a reason why I left the brochure on your desk”, he said.

The penny dropped and I felt stupid for not knowing. It was in his eyes. It had been for months.

My lawyer said that this could be all I needed.

“It is definitely a pass at you … that is, if you don’t want the implants”, he said. “But can I say that I think that you would look great with bigger breasts. You just can’t use it if you take the offer”.

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| My lawyer knows what I am. It turns out that he has a thing for ladyboys. I think many white guys do. Sometimes I think that all white guys, and maybe black guys too, think that all Asian men should become ladyboys, as if our size and lack of body hair puts us halfway there. But you can’t sue everybody.It is not like I dress like a call girl. I like to pick nice clothes that are suitable for the office. I have really got very interested in fashion.It just seems like everybody wants me to be female. Is that a punishment? It sure doesn’t feel like it. I love being Taya. Maybe it is a reward?The End© Maryanne Peters 2021 | Rose Chalisa : transgoddessesLadyboy Chalisa “Rose” Yuemchai |

*An Asian man keeps getting told he's so pretty he should be a woman, he gets passed over for promotions that go to white guys and even white women … a lawyer advises him to set up a sting, go along with the guy's invitations until he makes a proposition that can be recorded and action taken, but the lawyer's real aim is blackmail, so he never has enough for legal action until he has enough for the real claim slowly the victim is whipsawed between his boss and his lawyer, each of whom keeps pushing him further into feminization until SHE discovers that she is now pulling the strings, neither of the men can resist the charms of the beautiful woman she has become. Of course at this point she runs away, horrified but somehow unable to give up being a woman…*

