Love at Last

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I guess I was always a performer. Maybe it comes from being the middle child – the one seeking attention. Look at me! Look at what I can do!

My mother said that I should be in show business. I am one of those people who, if you put an idea in their head, it just sticks and never comes loose.

I had jokes. I could do impressions – of men and women. I could sing – in any register. I could even dance with funk or with grace. None of this came with instruction. My mother said: “You are a natural entertainer”. I was getting noticed, and I liked that.

So, when I left school, I decided to make a living out of it. All the entertainers on talk shows say that if you can make a living it is a great life, but not many succeed. I was determined to be one of that minority. But I had no idea just how hard it would be – how many crushing disappointments I would need to suffer.

The problem is that it is a life, not just a job. You can take any work that you can off the stage, just to be able to be on the stage. You can wait tables or scrub pots. But that is not what you want to do, if you are a performer. Other work is just pretending, or filling in time, or making a little money. You head is always somewhere else.

Living hand to mouth does not help with relationships either. You have to be free of what ties another person, so that you can take the work when you find it, even if it is just in the chorus in a small time musical, so long as you are on stage. Another performer perhaps, but it only lasts until life as a performer forces you apart.

It is not even about the audience. Some love you, some hate you. It is about the performance. You can walk off in a chorus of boos and still feel you did a good job. You can be proud of your work even if it falls flat.

But flops don’t make for a future in show business. Depending on others to find you work doesn’t work. I needed to find myself an act. Something that I could sell myself.

I sort of fell into drag. I was doing a comedy act with music and impressions and somebody said that it might be better if I wore a dress and some makeup. I would not be the first, but there are always new angles. I could use all my skills if I could make this character work.

My girlfriend at the time was very supportive. She thought that the stand-up tranny routine was a great idea. It was comedy. She suggested material. “A guy trying to make it in a woman’s world”. She even helped me with clothes and makeup.

This was not real drag – not over the top with the look. My character was me (billed under my name) but appearing on stage as “Helen” (said to have “the face that launched a thousand shits”) a trans-person trying to fit in. There were a host of gags – the sex and toilet gags had a new angle when the comic speaks with knowledge of both sides. I had some music too – women’s songs sung by a guy, and guys songs sung by a woman. All for laughs. I got a few.

I picked up some stories from real transwomen, and I incorporated them into the act. Some were funny, and some were sad, but somehow audiences found those sad ones just as funny. I suppose I found a new respect for trans-people. I came to understand that being transgendered was no joke and almost resenting the laughs in places. But in comedy laughs are money. Try not to judge your audience. People can be stupid or cruel, or both.

I got better at presenting myself as a woman. Somehow, the closer Helen came to appearing genuine, the better the act got. It was no longer billed as a drag act. It became “gender comedy” with titles like “Walk on the Funny Side” and “Trans-Humor 101”.

I even heard it said that I was not really a guy at all – that Helen was played by a woman. I am not sure how I felt about that. Was it a compliment?

My girlfriend suggested that maybe I should step out in daylight a bit, to try to pick up material on my own. I was telling jokes about my gender problems without having experienced any.

“That’s because its fiction,” I said to her. But in the end, I tried it. I wanted to break a mind block, and so I dressed in women’s street clothes and I went shopping.

I suppose that the first thing that I noticed was that I was not noticed. I put that down to the fact that I had by then been doing it for months so I could “pass” as they say. I was almost disappointed. Where are the funny stories about being trans if I do not get recognized as being trans?

I had to force it. I had to swagger or talk in a deep voice. Or buy a bra using gel breast forms out of my handbag. But somehow that seemed cheap. My show was all about a transwoman struggling in the in-between, and the pain of that struggle lightened by humor. It just seemed wrong to break type the way I was doing.

I am not saying that I came to identify as transgender at that time – it was just that I was starting to truly understand what it was like to be really female but trapped in a male body.

I started to spend more time with the transgender friends that I had made, and that saw me drifting away from my girlfriend. I even had sex with one of my new girlfriends – anal sex because she was still to have affirmation surgery. When she orgasmed with a distinctly male scream of joy, I remember thinking that she was having more fun than me. Maybe it was just that it was disconcerting to hear a man as my sex partner. But somehow, she did not seem male. I am sure that she would have been pleased to hear me say it.

When my girlfriend left, I was offered hormones by another of my new friends. The suggestion was that they might help me to get over her somehow. I was told that the combination of the two drugs would reduce my sex drive and might produce a sense of wellbeing. Not a high, just a deep satisfaction that the others felt. And the loss of libido would mean that I would not be craving for somebody to replace my girlfriend. And given the way that I looked, finding that replacement looked difficult.

Perhaps stupidly, I took what was offered. It was a three-week course. It sat in the medicine cabinet for a week or so before I decided to try it. It changed my life, if my life had not been changed already.

I had a new subject for my act: Body changes. Even before they had started, I knew enough to build a series of jokes around them. It sort of forced me to keep going, and to seek a new prescription by claiming that I was truly transgender. The prescribing doctor took one look at me and accepted it as fact. I looked transgendered even if I was not that, if that was what I was.

I spent less time dressed as a man. I bought more feminine street clothes and shoes and bags. I never bought another item of male clothing again – except later for someone else.

I went to see my mother dressed as Helen. She said: “You look truly beautiful as a woman. No wonder your act is such a success.”

I wanted to tell her about my genuine confusion, but she insisted that I tell her some of my jokes and sing her a few songs. She seemed to look straight past the woman now emerging to see her son, the performer and comic. So, I did not push my problems on her. I think that she still sees me as her son in a costume, to this very day, even after all that has happened.

One of my transwoman friends was going in for surgery, so I volunteered to go with her as a support person. That meant suspending performances for a bit, but I felt that the opportunity to get new material for a whole new part of life as a transwoman was too good to miss. Please do not think that I was doing this not to be there for my friend 100%, but there was plenty to learn.

The thing that I remember about her experience was that her only fear going in was the fear of pain. There was no sense that this was a step that was irreversible – no trepidation that it might be a mistake – only a worry that it might hurt. And then when it was done, I remember the sheer unrestrained joy.

I assumed that there was no pain, but she said that I misunderstood. There was pain, and it was severe, but it was in her vagina. The mere fact that she could even tell me that was where it hurt, was a joy for her.

I had a new act where I told the audience that I had just come back from surgery, and I showed them the dilator that I needed to use. In fact I had a special one made that was so big that it made the audience gasp before they burst into laughter. I called him “Richard the Third” (Dick 3) and said that when he was in, I was the hunchback. I had new version of Richard made in fluorescent pink for more laughs.

There was a time when I felt guilty for making light of serious issues, but there were many in the trans-community who were my biggest fans. My act was still an act, but for them the problems that I was making jokes about were real, and they were laughing.

So, when did it stop being an act? I can tell you the moment down to the minute. It was when I met Gus.

Augustine Rowling worked in high finance. He was engaged to a perfectly ordinary woman and he had no interest in gender comedy. But he was dragged along to the show by some friends looking for a little levity in a hard week of work. At the end of my act they slipped the stage manager a few dollars to have me join their table for a few drinks.

I suppose that I was always a little awkward about stepping off the stage that way. I was never sure whether customers wanted to meet Helen or the man pretending to be Helen. Sometimes I felt that I was him, but increasingly I felt more like her. That particular night I was wearing a new dress – a cocktail dress rather than street clothes. I just felt more Helen.

He said: “I had heard that you might be a woman. I think you are.”

For reasons that I will never understand, the first word of my reply was “sadly”. I said: “Sadly, that is not true.”

It seemed as if in that moment we were both struck by the sorrow of my situation. He could never be interested in me. I could never be his. I am not saying that it was love at first sight, but there was a connection. We just looked at one another.

“I have heard that stand up comedians can be unhappy people.,” he said. “Is that you?”

“I’ll have a scotch,” I said. “Then we will see.” He smiled, and I felt a longing.

The hormones had knocked over my sex drive, which seemed useful. I could not function as a man and I was not a woman, so sex seemed impossible, yet I was not frustrated by that. But the feelings I was having were not sexual at all. They seemed to be driven more at an emotional level – the need for companionship or intimacy, or perhaps even more than that – a soulmate.

We talked but it was becoming noisy. He asked me if I would like to go somewhere private, for a nightcap. I agreed. His friends were laughing at us, but he did not seem to care. I felt that he was a man of such confidence that he did not care what they might think about him leaving the club with a tranny. I liked that. I made me feel safe with him. I liked that too.

We looked for somewhere nearby, but then he pointed out that his apartment was only a couple of blocks away. I accused him of using a great pick-up line.

“Why change a winning formula?” he joked, but I don’t think that either of us believed that when we got there, we would be in one another’s arms the moment the door slammed behind us.

I mentioned that I had sex with a male before, but that was not a man. My shemale friend was a woman with a cock. Gus was a man. There was no disputing that. There were whiskers on his face I could feel against mine, there was hair on his chest that I could run my fingers through, and he smelled of strength and power. In his arms my sex was changed. That was how powerful he was.

His hands on my tiny breasts were enough to burst me. I seemed to be boiling vessel underneath my skin. I was hungry for him, but I knew that I was still me.

“I don’t want you to see or touch me down below,” I said to him. In my rapture there was a growing sense of panic. It was the despair that this moment might end – that he might push me away in disgust.

“Don’t talk about it,” he instructed forcefully, in a way that thrilled me. His tongue in my mouth silenced me. It was perfect.

“I want to give myself to you, but I have never done this before.” It was almost breathless.

“Neither have I,” he said. I knew what he meant. His hands and tongue moved with the skill of a man who had made love to a woman many times, but never a man.

“A virgin?!” I teased. Always the comic.

I was the virgin that night, but not by the morning.

Can it be that I was transgendered all along? Why would I agree to the surgery if that were not true? Or was it that I was just a person in search of love and looking in the wrong place? Who knows that if we cross over to the other side, even just for a while, whether we will find our soulmate over there?

All I know is that I have found love at last.

The End

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