Consulting

A Very Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

When you first set forth on your career, you wonder whether what you can do is going to make a change in the world, or whether the world might change you.

I was a young man with a college degree, but not with a major in the Race Relations which it turns out is not really that useful. But I did have a minor in Business Studies, and that was enough to get me an internship with a small consulting firm.

This internship was barely a paid job. Details of my resume were made known to a wider potential customer base and I had the opportunity to offer business advice to anybody who thought that I might be able to help. The firm exercised some oversight in checking my business strategy and being available as a sounding board in return for a larger part of the fees generated.

While my name was put out I studied up hard on what would be required of me. Most businesses suffer from the same basic two basic problems: Not understanding how the business makes money; and not understanding how the business loses money.

I had in my resume that I had studied the exploitation of Latino workers for my Race Relations degree, and in doing that I had picked up some Spanish. That was what got me my first consulting job with the Rodriguez family. They wanted help to grow their business.

They had already made huge progress from when Mrs. Rodriguez (Momma) was sewing at home and had a small shop. She specialized in Quinceanera, prom and bridal dresses and had developed a reputation. By the time Mr. Rodriquez (Pappy) joined the business, she had 5 other Latino ladies sewing for her. Then, because they had no more room, she turned her garage into a cutting room, and sent sewing out to women to work on at their homes – a total of 12 machinists.

The first thing that I did was to persuade them to rent space. They needed a much bigger cutting table, and a specialist cutter, and sewing machines on site for better supervision. We still had “out-work” but with machinists on site at the new factory, we could produce more and better products.

Momma did her best, but the next thing I suggested was that she needed to hand over supervision and quality control to another specialist. The truth is that Momma was just too kind-hearted to stand over the workers. The garment trade is tough, and she was not the right person for that job.

I suppose that I had become really attached to Momma after on a couple of months working with the Rodriquez family. I was worried that she was getting overly stressed. What kind of an adviser would I be if my first client worked themselves to death? I had to be very persuasive. I told her that if she accepted my advice and we hired the new supervisor I had found – somebody that she did not like at all – I would work with her in any capacity she wanted.

She finally agreed. The good thing is, that it meant that she could go back to the work doing what had started it all, communion and prom dresses. That is what she loved to do. She said to me: “Amada,” (that is what she liked to call me) “we can work together to make the most beautiful things.”

I never really had any interest in clothes before I came to work with the Rodriquez family, let alone women’s clothes. But if you are going to advise on a business, you have to know the product. You have to know what is beautiful and what is not, and why. And then there is “gorgeous”. Something that is beyond the eye – an outfit that makes you feel good just to look at it. And then when you wear it, it does something special to you. It makes you somebody else. You have to know that feeling.

But I am getting ahead of myself. That is not how it went. She just needed a model.

Momma was more than a seamstress, she was what we call in this industry a pattern maker. That meant that she could look at a garment, or imagine a look, and draw a pattern. She knew instinctively how the fabric should be cut in two dimensions to achieve a look in three dimensions. She did her best work when she and I were together. Of course, she had a dressmakers’ mannequin, but anybody will tell you that this is a limited tool. It does not allow for movement. And for prom and ball dresses, movement is important.

It was not as if I had any kinky desire to wear women’s clothing. It was not that at all. Gorgeous dresses would give me special feelings, but not sexual feelings. Well, not really, but almost. When you look at yourself in such a dress, you feel like a princess. I mean, I don’t know what a princess feels like, but you feel special, and in a way that you feel that everybody else thinks you are special too.

So, to my surprise, it turned out that I had an eye for how others looked in a dress – not just me. That sort of became my skill. I spent more time in the dress shop, not just modelling but also looking at a customer and being able to say: “I know what would be perfect for you!” and actually know that.

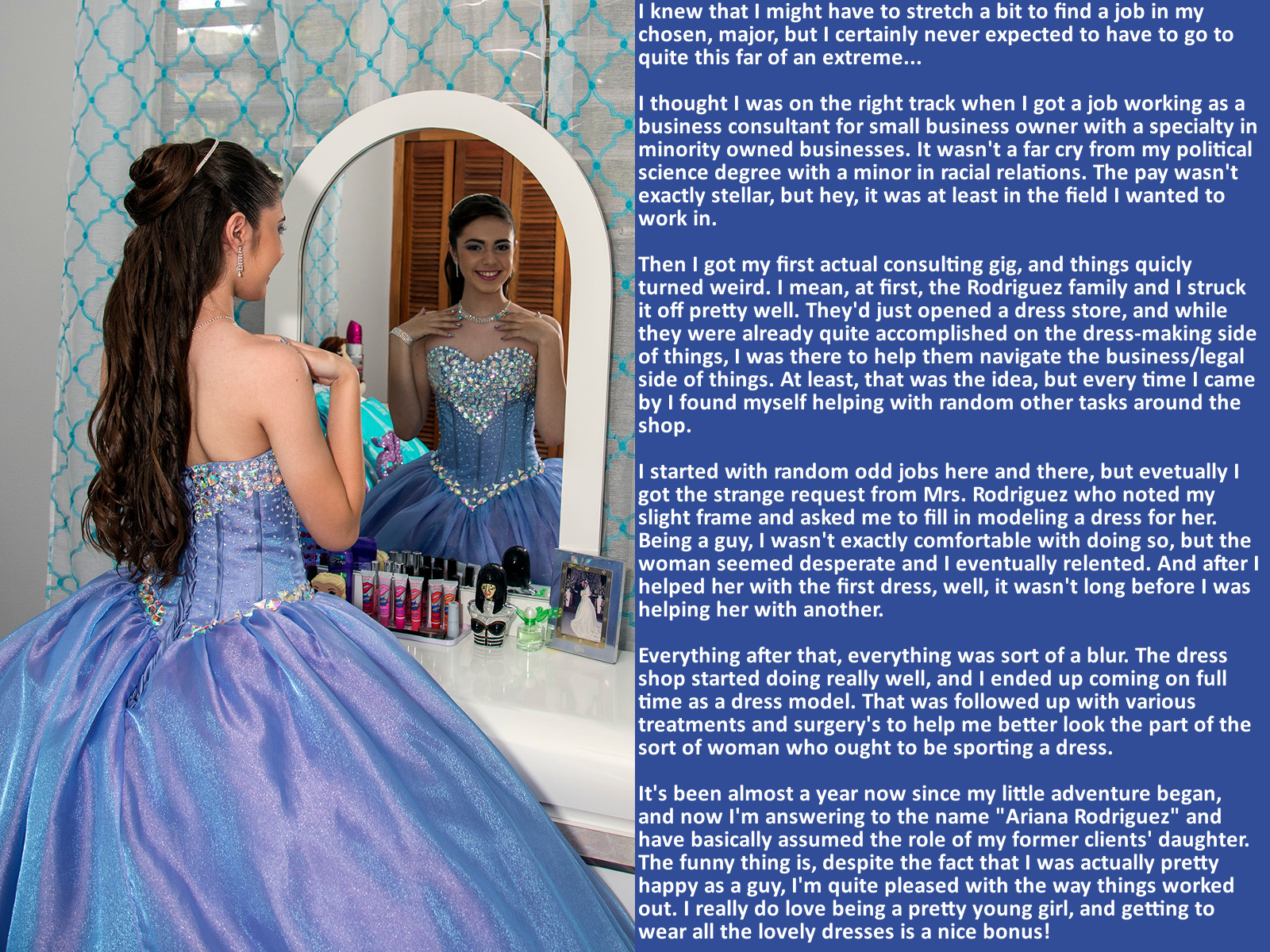
Somewhere along the line I became Ariana. Probably quite early. No girl is going to take advice on her clothes from some guy. She wants to hear it from somebody who knows what it is like to want to be beautiful. It turns out, that’s me.

My hair grew, but it could not get as long as it needed to be without some help from the salon. Momma and I figured that we needed to have the right look to present to the customer. Then I suppose, the next step had to be to adjust the shape of the mannequin to fit the shape of the customer. You do that all the time with the one on the stand, but to adjust me required the assistance of a surgeon.

I suppose that it might seem crazy that I submitted to all of this, but I really felt a part of this business by that point. In fact, I contacted my boss at the business consulting company and told him that I wanted to work with the Rodriquez family direct. He was not happy, as he was charging them twice what he was paying me. He told me that I was contractually bound. Momma and I went to see him. She told him that I was now part of her family – her daughter Ariana, and he could see that. He was shocked, I suppose. Anyway, Momma offered to pay him off and he agreed.

I was just so happy I burst into tears. I suppose because I had just had one of my monthly injections, I was just full of those girly chemicals. Sometimes you just cry because you can, now.

The funny thing is, despite the fact that I was actually pretty happy as a guy, I’m quite pleased with the way things turned out. I really do love being a pretty young girl and getting to wear all the lovely dresses is a nice bonus. Could you see yourself living my life?



The End

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