Pink Slip

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I think that I was just good at being the person that other people wanted me to be. My father wanted me to be an electrical engineer because he was in that industry, so I became one. My mother wanted me to be good at cooking as she was, so I was. I was not particularly interested in either, but I was keen to please.

Straight out of college I got a job working for an aerospace company designing circuits and switches. It sounds like interesting work, for an engineer anyway, but I was not really interested. But my father was very proud so it was not something I could walk away from. Besides, I needed the work. It was a time of slowdown in all aircraft production. The dreaded “pink slip” form advising of a lay-off was a looming threat.

The other reason I wanted to keep my job was that I had become hopelessly infatuated with a co-worker – Desiree Twomey. The only problem about that was that Desiree was a lesbian, or so I was told. Still. I like to imagine that I could change her orientation if she and I were stuck in the elevator overnight. It was a fantasy, but I was prone to those.

I had fears too. My boss was called Carl Stretch head of electrical, and his boss was the mercurial Lawrence "Lance" Brookingly, the brilliant engineer and designer – a man who designed “from the outside in”, whatever that means. Carl was under pressure to trim and he wanted me out.

Everybody was worried. In the canteen we would talk about it. Somebody said that if only he was black (none of us were) he could play the race card, and somebody else pointed out that there was a diversity policy that could protect somebody who as “diverse”, but none of us were.

“You could be gay, Johnny,” somebody said. Why me? Why is the little guy always the gay one? “Except you have that thing going for Desiree. You can’t be gay and a lesbian, unless you are trans.”

Everybody laughed. Everybody except me. I was thinking. I was thinking – Hey! Maybe? Why not? It could just be insurance. I could come out as trans and then defer my transition. I would be their first and only trans employee. They would not be able to hand me a pink slip.

I always thought that transpeople were sick. Not in a bad way, I mean mentally ill. I thought that any guy who wants to chop off his dick must be unwell. You think you are really a woman when you are not is like thinking that you are Napoleon, or Jesus. Look in the mirror, Buddy!

But a curious thing happened to me when I looked in the mirror. I started wonder what it would be like to really be trans. I imagined that such people look in the mirror and they see a woman dressed as a man. There is a woman underneath – can they see her?

I had decided that I would go to one of those transformation boutiques and be dressed up and have some glamor shots taken. If I could see the woman maybe I could make a convincing trans-person?

My thinking was that I would go to work as a man “privately transitioning” but I would show Carl and the HR people some pictures of “Joy” and tell them that this was who I was inside. I might not even have to appear as her outside the boutique place.

I visited the place that I found on the internet. They were very nice. They showed me some examples of their work. Some of their clients made not bad looking women, but I was picking up the things that could not be hidden – heavy brows, a big chin, square jaw, big hands. But I could not hide a smirk, so I passed it off as a smile with impatience.

They told me that I would be a great candidate and could make a very beautiful woman, but I thought that was just patter for everybody. I could have paid more attention to the gradual change in my appearance, but I didn’t. I just wanted them to finish and take the photos so I could change back and get home.

“Look in the Mirror, Sweetheart!”

I think that I was more confused than anything. It was like I could not see myself. There was somebody else in the mirror, but I was too transfixed to swivel in the chair to see how this trick was being played on me. Where was the brow and the jaw? The fact is that I never had such things. It was me, all right. I was a woman, and a beautiful one.

I just stared at myself, unable to speak. I turned my head a little; gave a little smile; a pout; toyed with a lock of my wig, gave it a little shake; smiled some more.

“Say something.”

“My name is Joy. Pleased to meet you.” From somewhere inside me came this sing song high pitched voice. It seemed like I wasn’t even trying. She could speak.

They had put the body stocking thing on me before I sat down, but then they had me stand up and try on some dresses and shoes. They had promised me a thrilling experience but I had not really been listening. That was for people who wanted a thrill, or maybe even needed it. I only wanted to keep my job.

But it was a thrill. I found myself become increasingly excited with every outfit I tried on. I found myself chatting away to these ladies in this voice that had come out of nowhere, and even throwing my hands around as if I was a girl, or a drag queen.

I have to say that the thought of looking like a drag queen brought me back down a little. I asked that the photographs be less glamor and more professional and demure. I remembered my purpose. I was here to create an image, not to be her – not to be Joy. But it was too late.

They printed the photos out on the spot and I took them home. They sat on the car seat beside me as if about to burn a hole right through it. When I got hope I took the images out of the envelope and could not take my eyes off them. It was almost as if I had fallen in love with the girl in the photo. Imagine waking up every morning and looking at that face.

I needed to tap myself on the forehead and get back to the plan. I took the single best image to work the following day and took it around to HR.

“This is me,” I said. “I want changes made to reflect my true gender. I don’t want to upset the workplace by making rapid changes, but I will be transitioning slowly over the coming months.”

I have to say that I was grinning inside when I saw the reaction, even though I was remaining serious on the outside. They did no know how to react. I was their first and only transgender employee, as I pointed out.

“I hope that won’t disadvantage me?” I said, watching them squirm. I imagined that my pink slip was in the folder on the desk, but that it would now be headed for the shredder.

“Can we keep the photo for a few days,” said the HR lady. I felt a pang of concern about being deprived of it even for that long, but I had others, and I needed them.

A few days later the boom came down and the pink slips came out. I lost a few people that I was close to me, or about as close as I was to anyone there, but I happily watched Carl Stretch receive his.

The head of HR addressed our design room with a short speech explaining the downturn we all knew about, expressing regret, wishing good fortune for the departing and talking about “a flatter hierarchy” in our division. Then at the end, perhaps as an excuse for explaining why I was still there, the head of HR told everybody that from now on I should be called Joy and referred to by the female pronoun.

If I thought that this thing could be kept between me and a few at HR then that idea came crashing down. But what are you going to do? I just gave a little wave and shy smile as if to say – “Hi, yes, I am Joy”, but I said nothing.

Nobody said anything to me either. I suppose engineers are like that. I looked the same to them, that day anyway.

The following day I was called into HR. It was clear the busiest that they had ever been, but they found time to have a short chat with me.

“We have discussed you position with leadership, Joy. We have decided that as a workplace we need to be fully supportive of you. You are not on the company health program, but we have arranged for you to have a free consultation with the Medical Officer and the company has agreed to offer you a modest grooming allowance to allow you to present yourself in the workplace in your true gender.”

Engineers understand that things go wrong – plans go awry, and things don’t always function as good design tells you they should. Somehow this caught me out, so there was nothing I could do but agree. It seemed that the company was more than accepting, they were positively encouraging.

The Medical Officer was a fully qualified doctor who headed a large clinic covering health and also accidents in the plant. He explained that he was not familiar with transgender issues but that he had read up about them. He said – “There is a step by step diagnosis but clearly you are what you are, so lets just get you on the blockers and hormones and schedule blood tests to see that they are working.”

It seemed as if everything was out of control. Hormones! But what was I to do now? I could not say that my claiming to be a disadvantaged minority was a lie to stave off a pink slip.

The initial injections were hard to take, but I told myself that my job was what mattered. The patches looked like nothing at all, but they turned out to be highly effective. Then I was handed a voucher to a local clothing boutique.

“I would love to help you,” the HR lady said. “You will be new to this, and I may be able to give you some pointers. This is not that much but it could go a long way.” It looked like a decent sum of money to me, but I had yet to learn the costs of women’s clothing.

I accepted the offer to shop together on Saturday afternoon. I went back home and pulled out my photos of Joy as I did every night. She just seemed so beautiful that it seemed impossible that I could be her. But then, that was me in those images.

I suppose that I decided that if you are in this, then you are in it all the way. The design team were waiting to glimpse their first sight of Joy, and when they did she was going to be nothing like me.

Friday dragged on, but when it finally came to a close, I told people in the office that this would be their last sight of me. On Monday the real Joy would be sitting in my chair. For some reason there was a spontaneous applause. It made me feel odd, but not in a bad way.

I was trapped. It was just supposed to be a statement of intent, not a real transition. But what I feared more was being a half-woman and sticking out of the crowd as some kind of pervert. I suppose at heart I was one of those people who just wanted to coast along and merge with the rest. Now to merge I could not coast along. I needed to put the work it.

That weekend buried myself in the internet and tried to watch every video on transitioning, developing a feminine voice and feminine mannerisms and understanding how to dress and apply makeup.

Accepting the offer from the lady in HR I went out with her and bought shapewear, dresses and cosmetics, and also a wig. She was a great help. She said that I should be proud to explain that the clothes were for me, and that this was to be my last week dressing as a man. Everything was going to be different from the following week onwards.

I knew that I would need months to get this right, but at least I would not make a total fool of myself on Monday. I spent Sunday dressing as and being Joy in front of the mirror and applying all that I had learned.

So Joy reported to work. She didn’t get an applause but words of encouragement from the female staff was appreciated. What I received from my male colleagues was looks rather than words. Some appeared puzzled and some perhaps horrified, but nobody laughed. Somehow that felt like success.

My wig was a blond bob and it looked really good but it was uncomfortable and the hair dropping on either side was annoying. I resolved that I should use my own hair the following week so I went to the salon the following weekend to have it colored and cut in a pixie style.

Somehow losing the wig made it harder for me to distinguish girl time from me time. It just all became girl time. I had watched so chick flick movies to pick up on female behavior but I now found myself preferring to watch these things just as a way of unwinding and to develop my voice and mannerisms.

Then, a few weeks on or design room had a visit from Lance Brookingly. It seemed like he never deigned to come down, but he strolled around the room looking at people’s work. And then he came over and looked over my shoulder. My work was nothing much, but it was well drawn and tidy.

“You must be Joy our trans employee?” he said.

I cleared my throat to give my girliest affirmation possible. “Yes,” I chirped. “That’s me.”

“We are fully supportive,” he said. “I had HR get things moving with the assistance of the Medical Officer, but when you are ready to move to the next step, we could assist with funding. I would like to see more women engineers in general, but let me help you to be our first, even if not by the conventional route.”

I suddenly realized that Lance Brookingly had taken a special interest in me and that he was behind me being pushed well beyond my plan. Was this what was meant by designing “from the outside in”? Was I somehow his special project? What was the next step?

Understanding that, it would seem foolish not to take advantage. I was stuck in this room with all these other guys. We were well paid, sure, but where were we headed?

“I would like to discuss my next steps,” I said. Did it sound a little suggestive? That was not my intention, but I was new to all of this.

“Make an appointment,” he said. He vaguely gestured in the direction of a young woman following him around. He moved on and I asked her to make a time for me.

It was a couple of days away so I had time to prepare with a trip to the salon to get some volume into my hair and a proper makeup job, and I wore a new dress showing off the beginning of breast that perhaps should have shocked me but I quite liked. He noticed them.

“Would the next step involve breasts?” he asked.

“I am not sure that this is appropriate talk with an employee in that way,” I said. I added with a smile – “But it might.”

It hardly seemed like it was me talking, but here I was with the boss, a man I admired hugely, talking about breast augmentation.

“I am interested in the development of all my employees,” he grinned. “Some more than others. I believe in investing in talent and giving that talent the training and emotional support to advance. It would be emotional support, would it not? You want to achieve your ambition to be a complete woman, don’t you?”

“Surgery is a big step,” I said. It was my chance to back out politely. “But I do like dresses which are a little more open in front.” And at a stroke I had signed up for a pair of tits.

There was no doubt that I was overcome by the attention I was getting from such a powerful and fascinating man. Man or woman you would not be able to ignore it. But I should have known that on his part it was more than just a fascination with the office transgirl. I suppose that I just did not have that intuition that women are supposed to have … because I wasn’t one. I was an engineer, and we look for the facts, not for the subtle signals.

He had me lined up for the breast augmentation and also “other surgeries to follow”. Is that a fact or a signal? The surgeon discussed options as I was recovering. It was all slightly surreal.

After my discharge from my breast surgery I was back at work showing off my new assets. I received a message from Lance to come up to his office suite after work. To be honest I was very keen for him to see what he had paid for. They were still in a supporting brassiere but the cleavage was magnificent and I was very happy with them in a way that only a woman could be.

“Come in,” he said. “I have something for you. Open the box over there.”

It was a pink slip.

“Put it on,” he said with a smile.

“What. Right here?” I could see him waiting, sitting on the edge of his desk with his arms folded, nodding.

I slipped off my dress which fell easily. My body was smooth because I liked it that way, and soft from months or hormones. I pulled it over my head and let the sensuous silk fall as only the real thing can. It fitted perfectly.

Being the engineer that he was he insisted on checking the fit, by running his hands all over it, and me. The kiss had to follow. My arms belonged around his neck.

I got my pink slip. In the end it did mean that I had to move on from the design room, but it was a move up - right into Lance Brookingly’s bedroom.

The End

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*Erin’s seed: I worked for an aerospace company …maybe you can turn my experience into a story. A guy working for a hi tech company finds out there are going to be layoffs so he comes out as transgender so they won't fire him and damage their diversity record . Make him something of a right wing minor asshole so he's convinced of this. But now he is beautiful, tall, slim, perfectly turned out and his boss's boss wants his body. She surprises herself by accepting this, having planned on being a lesbian at least until she found another job. His boss's boss needs a stepmom for his kids and she falls in love with him and his kids.*