Reborn a Maiden

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I don’t think that it is necessary to go into all the details of what I did at Pennsic 2022.  It is all irrelevant now anyway.  But what I do need to do is explain some of the background as to why I could not stay away from Pennsic 2023.

Trying to explain LARPing to people who don’t know anything about it, can be hard.  It makes me and my whole family seem like we are nuts.  It is just that we believe that having the ability to live another life in another dimension makes us better people.  We don’t take it too seriously, because if people don’t share our ideas, we just don’t care.  You can live your lives, and we will go on living both of ours.

My parents Alice and John Walker, started out in role playing science fiction.  That was why they named me Annikin – yes, Annikin Walker without the “Sky” in the middle.  At school they put it in anyway, so people just called me Sky” and I was OK with that.  I would even tell strangers that was my name.  I liked it.  It was an introduction to LARPing. “My name is Sky and I engage in live action role playing”.

When my parents discovered Pennsic they believed that it was LARPing in a medieval world, but we all soon found out that it was much more than that.  We all went to Pennsic 2021, which was not too far to travel for us. It was the first big event of this kind after Covid19 because it was largely in the open air.  By “all” I mean my parents and me, my sister Kitty and my aunt Darla.  By Pennsic 2021 I mean the huge 2 week medieval festival in a specially built campground outside of Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania.  By discovered I mean we all went crazy about it.

LARPers play games or scenarios, like dungeons and dragons in costume for a bit fun, but the society behind Pennsic has a much deeper purpose.  This is not fantasy where we can pretend to be elves, or werewolves, or lizard people from the Planet Bylon - this is human history.  The society studies, researches, teaches, and reproduces (within reason) all aspects of medieval life.  While everyone has a good time playing roles in a time long past, they also take the society’s goals and reputation quite seriously.

While the society does public demos, classes, and appearances for schools, museums and such, the annual event is not open to the public, it is for members and guests of members only.  We all enjoyed a family membership in 2021 with Aunt Darla registering on her own.

My father had always been interested in this era in history,  He talked about the crossover between “Cultures on alien planets equivalent to the middle ages” and the actual middle ages, like without ray guns, spacecraft or hovering land vehicles.  It just seemed easier to forget about things beyond our technology and go back to that time.  Everything could be for real.  Instead of “this is a ray gun that can stun you” we can say “this is a mace that can stun you” and it can. The reality of Pennsic made it different.

But like I said, we won’t talk about what happened during Pennsic 2022.  You just need to know that after that I was banned and so were my parents.  Kitty and Darla escaped any penalty. I would not be welcome in 2023.

But it was like I had been bitten by the bug.  Darla said that she was going back for Pennsic 2023 and Kitty was going too.  I was seriously pissed, but it was my fault I was in this position. To make up for it my parents suggested some 2-day science fiction convention.  It sounded terrible.  You have to understand – Pennsic 2023 was going to be the 50th Pennsic War.  It was going to be huge.  15,000 people were expected, and the final count was very close to that.

“Kitty and I are going as maidens anyway,” was what Aunt Darla came up with.  If you want to come with us, you will have to dress up and live the role of a maiden for the whole two weeks.  Would you be prepared to do that?”

“Yes,” I said.  It seemed like nothing.  Playing a role is playing a role.  That is what LARPing is.

“If you get caught then everybody is in trouble,” my father said.  “You need to rehearse this role and the costume has to be perfect.”

“Sure.  Sure.”  Dressed as a girl nobody would recognize me.  I could be Annie.  It was on my ID – Annie is short for Annikin.  You are not even allowed to use your “modern name” at Pennsic, but if anybody did, I would be Annie.

The whole event was scheduled to start on Friday July 28 and to finish on Sunday August 13, just before what was supposed to be my first year at college.  I had all the time in the world to prepare for Pennsic, and so Aunt Darla and Kitty suggested that I join them at Aunt Darla’s house and in her fashion clothing store from mid June.

Aunt Darla had a business that had grown much bigger off the back of LARP.  She still made space suits and alien costumes for the Science Fiction role players, but since Pennsic 2021 she had increased her Medieval costumes. She went the extra distance for “genuine clothing” including accessing hand-loomed fabric, and using leather and broaches and buckles made using a forge and primitive tools.  This kind of clothing commanded very high prices, but demand was high. Aunt Darla contracted out the needlework so that she could meet the demand and make the profits.

“Still, there is work here in giving you the skills that you will need to be a maiden in Middle Ages," she said.  “You can do leather work and some small metalwork, but first of all we will need to do something about that hair!”

Since her first Pennsic in 2021 my sister Kitty had been growing her hair.  After two years it was almost down to her waist which she felt was an appropriate length for the age we were entering.  Aunt Darla had always worn her hair long, but she too had put the effort into grow it out to a similar length for Pennsic.

"In your case we will need to use modern techniques to get you to the same length,” she said.  She was not talking about a wig.  It would be my hair extended and I would need to learn how to care for it and dress it over the weeks before we headed into Pennsylvania.

She also put me on what she called “The Womanizing Diet”.  I had no idea that especially for me it would be laced with some drugs designed to do just that.  The simple fact that all three of us were excited about what was coming, and we were committed to playing the roles we had sorted out for ourselves.  In my case it would be an even bigger challenge because my role included a change of gender, but that somehow made me feel a little superior.  If I was successful I would have something to feel proud of, which for me was not a common feeling.

With Pennsic coming up the shop was busy and so was the internet and phone ordering run out of the office out back of her store.  Both Kitty and I were put to work, with me starting on the phones and perfecting a feminine voice so that people would assume that they were talking with a girl.  When I started, I had a few people who were confused, but for me it was an honest statement to say - “My name is Annie!”  That could resolve things, but avoiding being mistaken for not being female could only be achieved with practice.

I needed to find new routines too.  As Aunt Darla explained, cosmetics barely existed in the Middle Ages.  A woman’s beauty was in her smooth and pale skin.  I needed to have the hair stripped from my body and my face, and I needed to adopt a skin regime which we all decided, could be assisted with modern products.  The only makeup tricks from the time we were about to enter was dark kohl for the eyes and rouge for the cheeks and lips, both which had been around since ancient times.  Modern equivalents could be used at least until we got to Pennsic, and I needed to practice on how to use them.

I had practice with my hair too, and I learned how to braid Aunt Darla’s and Kitty’s and then my own, and how to style long hair using pins only – there were no rubber bands in the Dark Ages.  Even the pins and the rings and hasps that were used, needed to be made of material available in those times – copper, bronze, bone and wood.  I found myself becoming interested in making things and wearing them in my own hair, or adding them to Aunt Darla’s catalog for sale.

Soon I was working in the shop passing off as being female. I explained to customers that I was also an artisan, specializing in making period-authentic hair accessories in copper, pewter and leather.  I got totally absorbed in that, and displaying my handiwork in my own long hair. I slowly found the feminine part of my new character absorbing me.

“My name is Annie,” became automatic.  But soon that name would be superseded.  Darla was to be Clarimond De Lisieux, a noble woman widowed by a Norman or high birth, and her nieces were to be Kerensa and Elestren Arundell who could trace their origins to Cornish aristocracy.  We were all attending Pennsic with our wares – costumes and accessories, and (in the case of Lady Clarimond), to look for a husband.

Aunt Darla had been unlucky in love, and it seemed that her alter ego was of a similar disposition.  As she put it, Pennsic offered he the opportunity to pretend to be somebody else and see whether another version of herself might have better luck.  Kitty said that she was not interested in men while she was studying, but for Pennsic she might be open to “a knight in shining armor should one turn up!”  I had no other purpose other than to enjoy the experience.

We decided to get dressed in our clothing before we left Ohio.  Lady Clarimond and Kerensa (Kitty) chose period undergarments but I had no such choice.  I had to wear something of the modern era to give me the shape of a woman – fake breasts and padded bust and something to render my crotch bumpless.  I had already worn it for some hours each day but from now on I faced the prospect of wearing it constantly.

In full costume we drove a large truck down to Pennsic to be there when the gates opened for sellers of merchandise.  That allowed us to set up our stall and our medieval tent on the plot we had booked, aligning us to a listed kingdom and shire.  We were in a state of high excitement.  We could barely sleep that night, but we knew we had to.

The following day made me feel that it was all worth it.  It is hard to describe it to somebody who does not feel about LARP as much as I do, but just knowing that everybody there has been looking forward to being in this time and place all year, and putting up with whatever drudgery they needed to endure for just these days of joy, is exhilarating.

It is one thing to be an alien or an elf, but to be of the other sex was something very different. Here was a part of my costume that nobody knew anything about. Nobody actually believes you are an alien or an elf, but it seemed that everybody accepted me as being female. It was a huge boost for me to even pull this off.

But perhaps the most wonderful thing was to be able to be beautiful and admired. This was new to me, but now appearing to be a woman, I clearly stood out. I was tall, and my hair was fully and shiny and perhaps my best feature, but I also had clear skin that shone even with just a touch of makeup. I had no idea about the hormones and the effect of them on the skin glands that produce something called sebum that made my skin “glow”. All I was aware of was the fact that I turned heads as I walked, and it made me feel good.

Then to cap it all off, the day after that I met Nickolas and Justin De Tempus.  We had been working at the stall all day, displaying our clothes on our bodies or simply hung up, and other items in our hair, changing regularly.  I was ready for a break and to brush out my hair and just let it waft in the warm late summer breeze while I looked at the other sights.

There was activity by the battlefield – sword fighting contests under discussion and young men sparring with wooden sword.  I decided to parade at a distance and see whether I might get some attention, and it soon became apparent that I was being stared at by most men.  The rattle of wooden exchanges would cease as I walked by.  I felt beautiful and powerful, with the ability to silence aggression by my mere presence.

It was not long before I was approached by two men, who might well have been mistaken for double vision were in not for the different colors of their tunics.  They were brothers – identical twins – and seemingly with an identical purpose.

“What is your name, Fair Lady,” said one to me.

“I am Justin De Tempus and this is my brother Nickolas,” said the other.

“You are to forward, Sir.  And you also, Sir,” I said, affecting ancient modesty to keep them engaged.  “But I can tell you that I am Elestren Arundell, here with my sister Kerensa under the care of our aunt, Lady Clarimond De Lisieux.  We are dressmakers and artisans, so please commend us to your mother or any other women who have care of you.” They looked young but older than me, and this was a gibe at their youth.

“We are under nobody’s care, let alone a woman,” said Nickolas, with some annoyance.  “In these times women are under the care of men.” While the rules of the Pennsic gave all proper rights to women, many of both sexes followed the norms of the age we were all imitating.

I put on a haughty laugh.  I said – “I await the arrival of such a man”.

“You have found him, Sweet Lady.  I am he.” It was the voice of Justin, coming forward.  “May I kiss your hand, if you will allow it.”

I put out both hands and each of them took one, placing more than one kiss upon it.

“Would you honor me by allowing me to escort you to the Concordian Feast tonight?” Justin asked.

“Hang on a minute, Bro,” said his brother, clearly put out. I had to smile. Twin brothers fighting over a girl who was not even a girl.

“You might be pleased to hear that I have a sister, if you have room for another,” I said.

“Is she as fair as you?” asked Nickolas, slipping back into his courtly role.

“Some say that she is the fairer of the two of us, although it is not for me to say,” I said. “Come back with me and meet her.

They each offered me an arm, and I led them from between them. On the short walk back to the market area they continued to lavish me with praises in what could only be said to be very plausible medieval chatter. When we arrived at the stall Nickolas clearly approved of my sister, and she was happy to receive an invitation to the banquet.

“What about me?” our aunt asked with mock offence. “Am I to be abandoned this night?”

The boys looked at one another and undertook rush off to the organizers to have Lady Clarimond De Lisieux included. It is times like this that I am sure that they wished it was simply a call on the cellular phone and the could bide their time flirting with us, but these are the middle ages, and without a horse messages must be carried back and forth on foot.

“I am not sure if you are aware of what is going on here, my lovely new niece,” my aunt said to me. “But that lad calling himself Justin is dead keen on you, and I think that he is in for a very unpleasant surprise.”

“But this is just a role I am playing,” I said. “I am sure that everybody understands that.”

“Just so you know, I am serious about trying to find a man here,” she said. “I am sick of Tinder and all the other dating apps. I want to meet somebody in the flesh first – somebody who shares my interests. Sure, I will be Lady Clarimond, and he will be whoever, but on first dates we all take on roles, and it is in the person beneath that we might find love. Plenty of people have left Pennsic having exchanged modern world contacts. Some of them are married now, with children. My time is running out, girls. I am looking.”

“Well, I won’t be giving anybody my number,” I smirked. “Cellphones haven’t been invented.”

“I have to tell you that last year I had sex with a guy,” said Kitty suddenly. “Don’t tell Mom and Dad, but it was just a casual thing. We both wanted it, and we both knew that the whole other world thing meant that it didn’t have to mean anything. I thought that I might see him here this year, but I am not looking for him. It was like another time. It is the opposite of you, Aunt Darla. I am looking for things that aren’t permanent. But for you, Annie, you need to be careful.”

“I can look after myself,” I assured them both. It never occurred to me that I might fall for a guy. That would be gay, and I was not gay.

But life and love are strange things. We went to the banquet, me with Justin, Kerensa with Nickolas, and our aunt with a man who styled himself Lord Marmaduke, which includes a titled that cannot be claimed by just anybody. We ate and we drank wine and mead, a liquor made from honey. The food was great – simple fare boiled in grassy herbs and roasted in its own fat, and somehow more delicious than anything in the modern world.

Justin had his hands all over me. I slapped him away to start with, but after had sucked my finger tips and then worked his tongue up my arms until it was in my ear, it seemed that I lost all resistance. But the time that the fruit and butter pudding was served we found ourselves under the stars outside the banquet tent with our tongues entwined.

It should have seemed so unnatural but it was the opposite of that. My long soft hair fell into his face, and his hands cupped my soft smooth face with its shaped brow, and I never thought of myself fo a moment as anything other than a woman. I should nhave been aroused and I was, but the male parts restrained in my groin remained limp and quivering, as if to say that they were nothing in the presence of his masculine dominance. I wanted to be submissive to him. I was.

“You are the most beautiful woman I have ever met,” he said.

I ached to be his. I wanted to ngive him more.

As I learned later, my older sister Kerensa felt compelled to pull both Nickolas and Justin to one side and whisper something to them - “While I am sure that your intentions are honorable, there is something about my sister Elestren that I think you should know,” she told them.  “My younger sister is what might be called “high-spirited”, so my father has her locked into a chastity belt making her quinny unavailable to lusty young men such as yourselves.”

“You’re kidding,” said Justin, losing the pretence of medievalism in his disbelief.

“No, sir,” persisted Kerensa.  “Her maidenhood is valued by my family.  Sometimes I wonder why mine is not worthy of the same protection.”

Nickolas turned to his twin brother with a sly grin.  He said simply – “Good luck to you there, Brother”, before turning to Kerensa to press his advantage with her.

All I knew about it was when Justin spoke to me in the quiet place between the banquet tent and thick bush which we had made our byre.

“Is it true that you are wearing something like from the Dark Ages, to stop us having sex … if that is what we wanted to do, that is?”

I had no idea what my sister had told him, but I could only guess that she had told him something to ensure that Justin would not even get to second base – because there wasn’t one.

“Yes, it is true,” I said.  “But there may be a way around it.” I could not believe that the words were coming out of my mouth, but it was the combination of my own rising need to have him kiss and fondle me even more ardently, and his puppy dog eyes visible in the half light, that showed me that was what he wanted to do, more than anything else in the world.

The way around it was to offer him my asshole. I never thought that I would ever do that for anybody, but I did it for him. It was the warm night, and a little drunkenness, and a whole lot of lustfulness. I gave myself willingly to a man, the way a woman should, which I suppose proved something to both of us.

Just like Pennsic 2022, all the other things that happened at Pennsic 2023 are irrelevant to this story. The only thing that needs to be said is that when it was all over, Sky Walker never came back from that place, if he ever existed at all. Annie Walker did, and she will always remember that place for the magical kingdom it was.

I was reborn. Just as the renaissance (the French word for rebirth) followed the middle ages I stepped out of that time into new era, an era with new knowledge and new appreciation of beauty and the simple joy of being alive. They called that period the Dark Ages and from there I stepped into the light.

Will I ever go back to Pennsic and live that simple life again, even if only for a couple of weeks? I don’t think so. The truth is that being a modern woman appeals to me, and looking like a modern woman appeals to Mark. No, I left Justin behind, or rather he did. All he had to do was to make his proposal a real world one, and all I had to do was to become a real woman, something only possible in this world.

The End

Author’s Note: I want to tank Typsie Tinker for introducing me to LARPing and to the annual Pennsic War, and for imagining Alice and John Walker and their children Kitty and Annikin (Sky) and the basic idea behind this story. I just started writing with only the barest understanding and sent half the story to Typsie who sent it back with corrections and suggestions.

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