Collecting the Reward

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Part 1

“I thought that I would meet you Sir, so that you could see that I was qualified to receive the reward if I am successful.”

There was a confidence about him that immediately appealed to Henry Spalding, although he was not the image of the man he would have wanted for his precious daughter Kate. He was good looking but not in a particularly masculine way, and his hair was long and slicked back into a ponytail. But he wore a suit and tie of some quality, and he carried himself well. They were the kinds of things that Henry noticed. They were the kinds of things that spelled not just ambition, but good judgment in a young man.

He was not the first such young man to pick up the challenge - $10 million of stock in Henry’s company for the man who could lure his daughter away from that harpy Gerde Braunch, her lesbian spouse. Stock that would be subject to a “no-sell” arrangement for a period to ensure that his daughter was in a relationship Henry approved of.

He was on the record as saying - “I don’t mind whether he is rich or poor. The important thing is that he is generous and kind-hearted”, but the truth is that he wanted somebody who was more interested in the business than she was, and somebody who could provide him with the grandchild he would like to build a future for.

“You have a college degree I see, but in marketing,” said Henry with a slight sneer, flicking through the well-constructed but overly wordy resumé. Brevity would come from experience, but there was ability and enthusiasm in the construction to make up for the lack of content

“yes, I majored in marketing , but I did papers in management. I am sure that I would have much to offer you as a son-in-law,” said Carson Harbutt. Then he leaned forward to get to the point. “But to be perfectly frank, Mr. Spalding, my real qualification is that I adore your daughter, and I want to make her my wife.”

“You know my daughter?” Henry was surprised. She spent so much time in Europe. It was annoying. To Henry Spalding Europe was the old world gone rotten. Old culture now populated with the decadent youth perverted by the thirst for pleasure over material things.

“I have met her a few times,” said Carson, an accomplished liar. “She barely noticed me, but that just increased my ambition. I might even confess to stalking her to some degree, but I hope my presence here convinces you that my intentions are honorable. The fact is that I think it a crime that she should be with that woman. She needs the right spouse, and I am convinced I am that person.”

“She needs a man, and it is as simple as that. But they have to be a good person, and good for her.” Henry liked this young fellow. He seemed genuine, but also driven. It would be a challenge, Henry knew that. and this fellow seemed up for it.

“My interest in your daughter predates your challenge, Sir. My reason for pursuing her is love. I am just hoping that I might have your support to give me the best shot possible.”

“So, you are turning down the reward,” said Henry, with a trace of an ironic smile.

“I leave the reward to your honor, sir. But the generous and kind-hearted are unlikely to be motivated by greed, don’t you think? That is not why I am here.” Carson remained leaning forward, intently. Henry imagined that others would lean back and talk of their skills as lotharios who had never failed to win over a woman before and would not let a little lesbianism get in the way. But this young man was not one of those.

“It is a standing challenge,” said Henry. “But yes, you have my blessing. If you can break up this perverse marriage and take my Kate as your wife, you will get your reward, I promise you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Spalding,” said Carson rising to his feet. He affected a look of seriousness, but he was elated. He had a plan, and he would not be there if he did not think it would work. “Would you mind putting that in writing?”

Part 2 2

“You know that I am married, don’t you?” said Kate.

“I don’t care if I am nothing more than a brief fling. Just a moment with me as a stranger in your life would be enough, so long as I can be with you, even for a moment longer,” said Margot, her eyes getting moist. She pushes to one side a lock of chestnut curls.

Kate felt the emotion as only women can. She pulled Margot to her and caught the first tear off her cheek with the tip of her tongue before the kiss planted tenderly just below one of her beautifully made-up eyes.

“Life is so complicated,” said Kate, turning to rest a hand on the marble rail as she looked out over the city of Paris from Montmartre. “You find somebody who you think is your soul mate, and then somebody else comes along and you wonder how it could be that you were wrong.”

“I understand commitment,” said Margot. “I believe in it. But I believe in love more. I believe in love above all things. Don’t you?”

“Gerde loves me … in her own way.” Kate paused. It was her first expression of doubt in her marriage. She could sense it herself, and perhaps Margot could too. Would she take advantage of it? Women do. Women can be vicious when it comes to matters of the heart.

“Who wouldn’t love you,” said Margot. She stroked Kate’s cheek. This is how lesbian love is – an intensity expressed without aggression. “I cannot hate this woman for loving you.”

“Would you give me time?” asked Kate.

“Of course, Darling,” said Margot. “But please not without me today. Please today can we just be together. Let’s walk down to the Pigalle. Maybe we can browse Gallerie Lafayette then take tea at Laduree on the Place de la Madeleine, just the two of us. If you want time alone to consider after, then pray it be after today.”

So, they set off, to do all those things and more. Perhaps it was Paris that worked the magic that city famous for. Perhaps it was the doubts Kate had, given Gerde’s commitment to her job, one that Kate had told her was totally unnecessary, where she could provide from her generous allowance. Gerde was proud and a little resentful that she could not provide for her own wife given her considerable earning potential. And perhaps she was less than understanding of the fact that Kate enjoyed leisure because that was the life she knew, and not much else.

Or perhaps it was neither magic nor the pressures of marriage but the relentless yet unobtrusive attention of her new admirer, the beautiful a delightfully feminine Margot Harbutt.

They were drinking kir royales at the bar in the Marais around the corner from Kate’s apartment when she got the test from Gerde that she would not be in Paris the day following as promised. The best she was offer was “sometime soon”. It annoyed Kate rather than upset her.

“Are you alright?” said Margot, placing her soft manicured hand on Kate’s.

“I am fine,” said Kate, all the better for making a decision. “Are you ready to go to my apartment? Is it too early to go to bed?”

It was early, but they had eaten a small meal. They were both women concerned to maintain their figures – Kate’s the more voluptuous, Margot’s more boyish.

“Are you sure?” said Margot, rejoicing internally.

“Yes,” Kate stood and so did Margot, and they walked away, hand in hand.

In the cramped lift to the garret they embraced and kissed with a delicate passion, their hands exploring one another just a little, to keep something for what was to follow. The door of Kate’ apartment closed behind them.

“Kate, I am yours,” said Margot. “But I need to tell you something. I need to explain something, because you have never seen me naked, and I so want to be naked for you. It is just that you may be for an awful shock, because I have an ugly birth defect. I am looking to have it corrected as soon as possible, but for now …”.

“Margot, please,” said Kate, holding her hand to her new lover’s lips. “You poor thing. After today you understand how I feel. No birth defect that your clothes conceal can change the way I feel about you. Is it a port wine stain or something like that?”

“No, worse than that,” said Margot. “I have a penis.”

Chapter 3

Despite all that he now knew about Margot Harbutt, or Carson Harbutt, or whoever she of he was, Henry Spalding found her presence in his office had disarmed him. There was something sexually fascinating about her – such beauty and such mystery in a person he could never truly understand.

“But why would I approve of this marriage let alone pay for it? My daughter is swapping one lesbian spouse for another”, he said.

Three reasons,” said Margot. “The first one is contract. You agreed to me breaking up the marriage with Gerda and marrying her myself.”

“But you were a man then,” said Henry. “You are obviously not that now.” The difference was remarkable and yet the traces of the man who had been in his office less than six months before were there. It was just her manner was so feminine, and so sophisticated. This was no invention. This must have been a woman all along?

“No in France I am no longer a man, no,” said Margot But here I am still a man. In this jurisdiction I am male and will stay so until we are married. We have already applied for a marriage certificate and it is all completely legal. Kate has only one condition. I will become a woman after our marriage, but until then I am keeping this.”

To Henry’s shock Margot had lifted her dress right up and pulled down her panties and restraining garment to reveal a fairly large but pink and hairless, dangling penis.

“Good God,” said Henry evidently involuntarily. He looked back up at her face grinning with satisfaction and shook his head a little to gather his thoughts.

“She may even change her mind and let me keep it,” said Margot. “I never thought I wanted it. I am truly a transwoman you see, already on hormones when we first met. But now I am wondering if a relationship is better with at least one penis, even one between two women?”

Henry was in discomfort by such talk and he needed to change the subject. “And your second reason?” he asked.

“I will give you – no, I have already given you what no other lesbian wife could give,” said Margot, with visible confidence. “You see, Kate is pregnant, by me, in the natural way. So, we are expecting in the fall. Oh, and should I proceed with the surgery I have sperm collected for any brothers and sisters that we might want in the future.”

Henry was suddenly ready to listen. He had a vision of at least four grandchildren sitting quietly as he told them the story of his life by a blazing fire, their mothers busy in the kitchen.

“And you said there was a third reason?” he asked.

“Well, I am interested in your business,” said Margot. “I always have been. Your daughter and your business, in that order I like to think. But whichever I think, you may have some idea of just how resourceful and ruthless I can be, and as a part of your family I would be working for the interests of our family, including your only grandchildren. You might have had any old son-in-law but instead you will have a daughter-in-law whom you know can be counted on. Am I wrong?

Henry Spalding stared at this woman, or man, or whatever she was. She was young, and beautiful, cunning and ruthless, and he was in shock.

But he knew that in business, shock paralyzes just when decisiveness is needed.

“No Margot, you’re not wrong,” he said. “And I think that I owe you some money.”

The End

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Author’s Note: This story is based on a real-life reward offered as reported in Hong Kong – “Cecil Chao announced the financial reward of HK$500 million after his daughter, Gigi, married her same-sex partner of seven years in France earlier this year, the South China Morning Post reported. “I don’t mind whether he is rich or poor. The important thing is that he is generous and kind-hearted,” 76-year-old Chao was quoted as stating.