Handsome Stranger

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

He had decided that the only way to finish what he had started was to get away from all distractions. His city studio was comfortable, but the city itself was right outside his front door. It was not the noise or the light. It was more the temptation. And because he had visitor’s there from time to time, he kept it tidy. He needed a place where he could throw some paint around.

Just as he was contemplating where he would go to get the work done over a beer at the bar on the corner, a man lurched over towards him, clearly having drunk a little too much.

“Hey there, Pat is it? I hear from the barkeep that you are a painter. I have a cabin up on Lake Gibbous that needs painting,” slurred the stranger. And before Pat could say – “I am not that kind of painter”, the man added – “I just can’t find somebody to do it, being as the cabin is miles from anywhere.”

So instead of scolding the barman for belittling his art, Pat tipped him. He had taken the job from the drunken stranger. He would get paid and had occupation of a perfect place for a month to do a job that would take him a few days at the end, with paint and brushes supplied.

It was perfect. Isolated among the woods but with the lakeshore to the south and clear of close trees except at the back, it offered good light and a breeze to ventilate the living room that he would use. He moved all the furniture and other items to one side and spread plastic across the floor of polished board. He had instructions to paint the outside and some of the inside. He had all the time in the world to create something special.

His mind had been full of strange images lately – images that were disturbing. He knew that great artists often teeter close to madness, but he was determined not to go there. What he felt he needed was a blank canvas and a clear head.

Some of the paintings that he had sold were images of women. They were often set in a backdrop of another world, but the women themselves were human, or mainly human, wearing flimsy garments over their voluptuous bodies and staring suggestively at the man viewing the painting (he had to be a man) as if calling for him to buy the painting.

Those were paintings to be bought for people like him. People who could imagine other worlds and furious sex with exotic and sensual women. There had been sales, but his world had become dark. His women were becoming angry and increasingly unattractive. The last few had not sold. He had withdrawn them from view. He needed to get things right, which is why he was at the cabin.

The city promoted darkness, or so it seemed to him. The air was clear. The sounds were only of nature. The light was good.

He set up his easel and took a canvas from the stack he had brought with him. He closed his eyes.

His hand seemed ready to act even before he had an image in his head. This could be good. The paints on his palette seemed to have got there by accident. He started with the background. It was greens and browns, not the colors he usually used. It suddenly dawned on him that this was a scene on Earth, in fact the woods and the lake outside the cabin.

It was different but not bad. What else would happen? But it was late and the natura light had gone. The electric lighting in the cabin had a yellowish hue that would make the colors wrong. Besides, he was tired.

The bedroom was on the other side of the house, behind the fireplace. There was another smaller fire in that room sharing the chimney. There were two old fashioned wardrobes, one full of male clothes (the drunken man he guessed) and the other with women’s clothes. The bed was large and inviting. He washed off his hands first with turpentine and then with soap, and then he stripped to his boxer shorts and fell into bed.

He decided to direct his dreams towards the woman who would appear on the canvas in the morning. What would she be wearing? Would she be naked? Blonde or brunette? He slept.

There were dreams, and they were not as unpleasant as recent ones had been. But nor were they of her – the woman he was to paint. Instead, a man appeared. A tall handsome man, striding through the woods. It was as if he was walking along with him but at a distance, seeing him through the trees and exchanging glances, like lovers playing a game. Lovers?

When he awoke, he tried to rationalize this dream over his morning coffee. It seemed to him that this was a positive move. The dark self-destructive thoughts had been replaced by something positive, although perhaps a little bland. But his hand had moved the day before. He should let that happen again today.

He went back to the canvass and painted the man.

He had it done before midday. He stood back to see what he had created. The handsome man was walking towards him, with a look of desire and intent in his eyes and in his stride. He almost seemed ready to step out of the picture and into the plastic sheeted room. He felt lightheaded, and ready to faint.

Had he just swooned? The sexual power of this stranger had leapt out at him, as if he was a woman.

What he needed was that woman. There was still some work to do to the painting of the man but he put it to one side and set to work to paint a woman. The background turned out to be the very cabin that he was standing in – the porch facing the trees.

He put new colors on his palette for her – he mixed pinks and delicate hues. Just like before, his hands were barely his own. The creative power of inspiration had taken hold. He had to let it go. He had to see what it would produce.

He buried his vision in the brush strokes. She would be waiting for her handsome stranger, with a look of wanton excitement in her eyes. She would be ready and hungry for him. This was the woman he wanted to paint. She was taking shape and he was getting excited. This was true art being born.

He stood back with a smile, but that soon disappeared. It was him. He was looking at a self-portrait. Sure it was a woman, with long hair and breasts, but it was his face! Perhaps the face was a female version of him, but it was unmistakably him.

The problem was that the painting was good. It was just wrong. He put it aside, next to the one of the handsome man coming out of the woods. There he was … hungry for her. There she was waiting, and just as hungry for a man. The paintings were great. The only problem was that the woman was him.

He pulled out his sketch pad. He would draw another face. He scribbled frantically. The first sketch – him as a woman. A different woman, perhaps, but his face. Another – just like him. He walked over to the fireplace and threw both sketches into the grate as crumpled balls. Another. Him. Another. His face just kept appearing.

He decided that he would get a mirror and stand it up, and sketch what was not there.

He looked at his face. He had never realized it before. He did have a feminine face. He could see it now. The sketches just showed him what he could look like. Could he look like her? Could he really look like a woman.

In the bedroom he went into the second wardrobe. There was more than clothes in there. There was a makeup box to go on the dresser, and nail polish. And there was a colorful scarf to tie around his hair, and pull down a couple of his natural curls. And there were tweezers to plus out facial hair, and foundation, blusher, eye shadow, lipstick.

“This is art,” he said out loud to himself. “I am my own canvas. I am creating in three dimensions and then I can transfer the image onto the canvas.”

Clothes. He needed to find the right clothes. He found something nice, but then he set it off with a sash made of yesterday’s paint spattered plastic sheet. It made her look exotic and interesting, and very sexy. He pouted at the mirror. He changed his lipstick and pouted again. He added more mascara. He painted wings on his eyes. He had not done it before but he had seen it on others, and brushwork was his skill. The same with blending the colors of the eyeshadow and adding highlight to accentuate the checkbones. It seemed like he was a natural with this, as if he had done it before.

There was a pair of high heeled shoes in the wardrobe too, although what they were doing in a cabin so far away from anything was a real mystery. He put them on. They were tight but he could just totter over to the door and step onto the porch.

“Where are you, my handsome stranger,” he called out to the trees. “I am ready for you. Come and take me.”

He laughed, because he felt suddenly joyful for the first time in years. This little experiment in body art seemed to be doing him wonders.

He went back insidehe pulled aside the sash and unbuttoned the dress. He used his paints to paint a pair of breasts on his chest. They looked very nice – very buxom with big lickable areolae. But of course, they only worked from front on.

Then her was shocked to hear a knock on the door. There was no time to change clothing, but why should he bother? He was an artist after all, and artists do as they please. He just grinned and held that even as he opened the door.

There, standing on the porch, was the handsome stranger. Not a handsome stranger, but the handsome stranger. The man in the dreams. The man in the painting. The man he had never met before but now found himself wish that he was a woman so he could be bedded by just that man.

“Did you come here looking for me?” She spoke the words, not him. That is the only explanation. It was not even his voice.

The handsome stranger looked confused. He said – “Actually I came here looking for the artist who is staying here. You must be his model or something. Or … I am a just guessing that you might be his sister? I can see a family likeness. Anyhow, I am just delivering the groceries he asked for, that were not down at the store when he passed through. He gave me twenty buck to deliver them here himself.”

He was a very handsome man. What woman would not be affected.

“Have we met?” he asked her.

“I am sure that I would have remembered,” she smiled, wantonly.

“Shall I take this stuff through to the kitchen?” he asked nodding at the box beside his feet.

She reached out a hand. The nail polish was still fresh. She touched his cheek and then slid her hand down to his shirt to feel the hair on his strong chest under the fabric.

“Leave it there for now,” she said in a husky whisper. “Come inside. I have something to show you.”

The End

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Erin suggested: “A sort of ghost story - a guy moves into a cabin in the woods to get away from people for a while. He keeps seeing this guy who looks like the sort of man you see on romance novel covers and then the guy shows up on his doorstep and he is like holy shit! The guy goes away but now our heroine is obsessed with the guy and getting him to come back and why would he do that? So the lonesome writer decides to disguise himself as a woman to try to attract the guy to come back…”